+ LEBANON, ISRAEL, AND THE AFTERMATH
ANNIA CIEZADLO, YOSSI KLEIN HALEVI, THE EDITORS

THE NEW REPUBLIC

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GUNS! GIRLS! GRAFT!

DUKE CUNNINGHAM'S WIFE TELLS ALL

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Myths About the Israeli-Arab Conflict (I)

Is "occupation" the cause of this conflict?

In the decades in which the Israeli-Arab conflict has raged, certain myths have been repeated so often and so insistently by Arab propaganda that most of the world has come to believe them. Today, we briefly examine one of those myths.

What are the facts?

The myth of "occupation" being the cause of conflict. The very concept of "occupation," as applied to Gaza and Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank"), is a myth. When the Egyptians were in possession of Gaza for almost twenty years nobody accused them of being occupiers. The Jordanians, who were in possession of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") and much of Jerusalem for the same length of time, were not considered occupiers by the nations of the world and by the inhabitants of the area. The Israelis were considered "occupiers" when, after a war of extermination against them, they prevailed and came into possession of these territories. The oldest rule of warfare is that to the victor belong the spoils. Do people expect France to return Alsace-Lorraine to Germany? Do they expect the Czech Republic or Poland to return the German territories awarded to them after Germany's defeat in World War II? Of course not! Those countries evicted most of the original inhabitants or caused them to flee. Israel, in contrast, has never evicted a single Arab from these territories. On the contrary, lured by the prosperity the Israelis have created, tens of thousands of Arabs from adjacent Syria and Jordan have come to live there.

> "Those who advocate the ending of the "occupation" do so either out of ignorance or because they have a death wish for Israel."

Israel's "occupation" of those territories is a myth. But even so, the hope that Israel's abandonment of any territory – the same old "land-for-peace" formula – would bring about peace is an illusion and a fallacy. In order to establish peaceful relations with its northern neighbor Lebanon, Israel abandoned the security zone of southern Lebanon. But instead of acknowledgment and gratitude, the result has been never-ending attacks with Katyusha rockets, led by Hizbullah, the "army of God," which is supported and egged on by Iran and by Syria. It makes life on Israel's northern frontier almost unbearable. Israel, unilaterally and in order to appease the Palestinians, the United States and world opinion, vacated Gaza and evicted thousands of Israeli families and abandoned their homes, institutions, extensive agricultural installations, and valuable infrastructure. Not a single Israeli citizen, not a single Israeli soldier, remains in Gaza. But, in the few months since it has abandoned that territory, Israel has been provoked to bloody warfare and has been subjected to daily attacks by Qassam rockets. It is only a matter of time until one of those devices will crash into a school or into a hospital causing untold casualties and destroying vital infrastructure.

Destruction and almost civil war. Instead of using their newly won "liberty from occupation," the Gazans have engaged in what is practically a bloody civil war and have destroyed most of their meager infrastructure. They have demolished and vandalized the valuable and extensive greenhouse installations that the Israelis had created, which could have been the basis for a prosperous agricultural economy and of substantial export income. But they focus their efforts and their energy on digging tunnels under the wall that separates them from Israel, in order to attack Israeli military, killing and kidnapping their soldiers, and thus bringing added misery upon themselves. Having the disastrous examples of the withdrawal from the southern Lebanon security zone and now from Gaza, it is easy to imagine what would happen if Israel would not have learned from experience and – under pressure from the U.S. and world opinion – would commit the folly of abandoning Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank"). While Gaza is isolated, surrounded by Israel and the sea, the "West Bank" is connected to Syria and Jordan. Within days of Israel's abandonment of that territory, Syrian tanks, Syrian aircraft, Syrian artillery, and Syrian and perhaps even Iranian troops would be stationed on the ridges of the Judean hills that dominate Israel's heartland. That heartland is only nine miles wide at its narrow waist. Israel's population centers, Israel's military installations, Israel's industrial capacity, Israel's utilities, and Israel's international airport would be in the gunsights of the Arabs, sworn to the destruction of Israel. The attack against Israel, the hoped-for final assault against the hated Jews, would begin within days or weeks and might well be successful.

The Palestinians, along with most other Arabs and Moslems, are single-mindedly focused on the destruction of Israel, to "wipe it off the map." If Israel were pressured into ending the "occupation" of the territories, it would not bring peace. On the contrary, it would bring about bloody warfare, just as in Gaza and Lebanon, and could well be the the end of Israel. Those who advocate the ending of the "occupation" do so either out of ignorance or because they have a death wish for Israel.

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CORRESPONDENCE

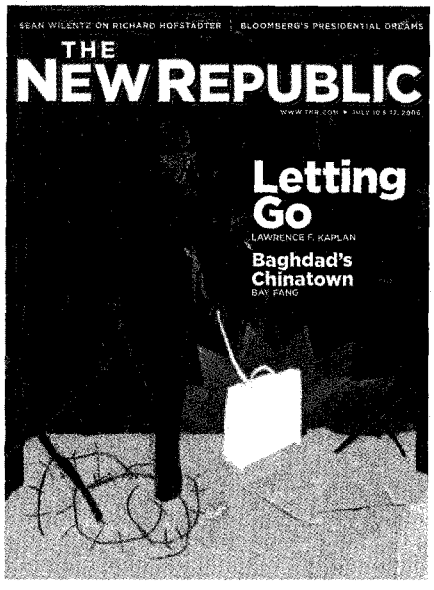
MAX TO GRIND

THE EDITORS RECENTLY TOOK MAX Baucus, my former boss, to task for insufficient fealty to Democratic principles as the top Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee ("Rank Disloyalty," July 10 & 17). But, in citing examples of what they regard as his Democratic apostasy, they ignored other areas in which Baucus was a leader on behalf of those very same principles. From fighting for the 1990 Clean Air Act to opposing drastic cuts in Medicare and Medicaid, Baucus has earned a more balanced assessment. But their deepest failing was their implicit rejection of compromise and those who practice it. Legislating is the art of compromise, and Baucus is a legislator. Even with the GOP controlling Congress and the White House, Baucus has shown how Democrats can succeed, sometimes with strong opposition (as in the case of President Bush's push to privatize Social Security) and sometimes with bipartisan compromise.

Take the refundable child-care credit in the 2001 tax bill. Baucus and Finance Committee Democrats worked with Republicans to achieve Democratic principles and assist millions of low-income American families. He should be praised, not pilloried, for that kind of leadership. If listening more to the American demand for greater civility in Congress means that leaders like Baucus engender partisan ire, it seems a small price to pay for achieving a better deal for working families.

TOM SLITER
Washington, D.C.

IN THE INTEREST OF FULL DISCLOSURE, Baucus is a friend of mine, and I worked for him on the Senate Finance Committee from 2000 until 2003, when some of the legislation that the editors criticize became law. Among other key omissions, the editors did not mention a major 2002 rewrite of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Program, which extended new training, income benefits, and a first-of-its-kind health insurance benefit to tens of thousands of workers displaced by imports. These new benefits passed largely because President Bush wanted authority to negotiate new trade agreements as a quid pro quo. As a supporter of both free trade and worker-adjustment programs, this seems an excellent example of a case where compromise results in a better solution. The editors are right to be concerned with parts of the prescription-drug bill, but they fail to mention that more than 31 million people now have drug benefits as a result of the law, many of whom did not previously have them. Registering seniors for the program was not smooth, but it was the most significant expansion of social programs in two decades. Would the editors prefer that seniors wait for their prescription-drug benefits until a distant day when right-thinking Democrats hold the White House and large majorities in both houses of Congress?



The reality of the legislative process is that those who refuse to compromise generally end up irrelevant. This is something that Democratic standard-bearers like Ted Kennedy recognize when they work with President Bush on issues like education reform. The prescription-drug bill wasn't perfect, but the alternative to it was hopeless gridlock—not perfect legislation.

GREG MASTEL
Washington, D.C.

THE EDITORS RESPOND:
The letter-writers point out that Baucus does, in fact, have a few good deeds to show for his tenure in Congress: roles in passing the Clean Air Act, refundable child-care credits, trade-adjustment assistance, et cetera. But it would be shocking if he didn't. Even the vilest, most cynical GOP senator, which Baucus certainly isn't, can boast *some* noble record of achievement. Tom DeLay was, by all accounts, a devoted advocate for orphans. Jesse Helms eventually came around on HIV funding. Obviously, one must weigh the relative importance of a legislator's accomplishments before rendering judgment. And, by that calculus, Baucus deserves all the suspicion he inspires, since, at least during the Bush era, his achievements have been relatively minor and his betrayals extremely costly. The Medicare prescription-drug benefit is a perfect example. Yes, in principle, it's a good thing that millions of seniors now have access to prescription drugs. But, partly as a result of Baucus's efforts (or, rather, his insufficient backbone), the bill lavishly subsidizes insurance and pharmaceutical companies, which ultimately short-changes seniors and makes the program a fiscal disaster. Which brings us to Baucus's willingness to compromise, something both correspondents identify as a virtue. In fact, it's Baucus's central failing. What Baucus doesn't understand is that compromise isn't a good thing in itself—it's valuable only insofar as it produces good public policy. And, when one side not only refuses to negotiate in good faith, but also actively exploits the good faith of the other, the public policy consequences tend to be pretty lousy. Unfortunately, that's the story of Baucus's tenure as the senior Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee over the last six years. ■

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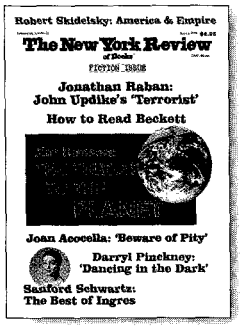
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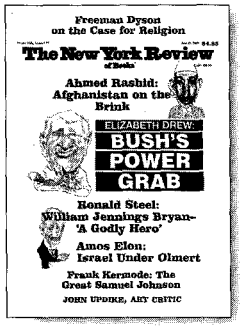
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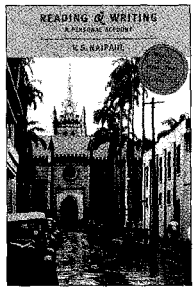

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The Ned Scare

TRB FROM WASHINGTON

Is Ned Lamont today's Carl Maxey? Maxey, an obscure Spokane attorney and anti-Vietnam activist, seized his 15 minutes of fame in 1970 when he challenged Washington state's famously hawkish Henry "Scoop" Jackson in the Democratic Senate primary. Maxey, unlike Lamont, got crushed. But his antiwar allies took over state parties in Washington and across the country. And, two years later, in a stunning upset, they powered George McGovern to the Democratic presidential nomination.

Does Lamont's victory over Jackson's ideological heir—Joe Lieberman—mean McGovernism has returned? Yes, but not in the way you think. The big similarity between today's antiwar Democrats and yesterday's is structural: Both movements shifted power from politicians to grassroots activists. Before 1972, Democratic presidential nominees were chosen largely by Democratic politicians—bosses like Chicago Mayor Richard Daley who controlled whole blocs of convention delegates. In 1968, they handed Hubert Humphrey the nomination even though he had not competed in a single primary. The McGovernites changed that. After 1968, they pushed through reforms that barred backroom deals and ensured ethnic and gender diversity. The bosses were emasculated. When the party convened to nominate McGovern in 1972, only 30 of 255 Democratic congressmen were among the delegates. Daley's Illinois slate was rejected for running afoul of the new rules and replaced by one led by the Reverend Jesse Jackson.

In the 1980s, the pendulum swung back. The party created "superdelegates" to give politicians a larger role in choosing presidential nominees. The newly formed Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) attacked liberal activists for pulling party nominees too far to the left. And, when the DLC's candidate, Bill Clinton, won the nomination in 1992, he dispensed with the laundry-list platforms of the past, which had promised goodies to each interest group. To this day, the DLC remains an organization of politicians that believes the less beholden politicians are to grassroots activists, the better they will represent voters as a whole.

The "netroots" that fueled Lamont's candidacy could not disagree more. They believe that, as the party's grassroots base has atrophied, Democratic politicians have grown complacent, unresponsive, and downright corrupt. And they are using the Internet to reassert control—to keep closer tabs on how Democratic members of Congress act and to punish those, like Lieberman, who defy their wishes. By allowing activists to communicate, organize, and raise money far more effectively than ever before, the Internet is doing what the McGovernite reforms did a generation ago: transferring power from politicians to activists.

But, while McGovernism and Lamontism are structurally similar, ideologically they are worlds apart. McGovernism constituted, above all, a rejection of cold war *liberalism*. It was anti-communist liberals like Lyndon Johnson and Humphrey—not marginal right-wingers like Barry Goldwater—who had taken the United States into Vietnam. And for McGovern—who had been opposing cold war liberalism since 1948, when he backed Henry Wallace over Harry Truman—Vietnam was merely a symptom of the larger disease: anti-communism itself. "The war against communism is over," he told the journalist Theodore White. "Somehow, we have to settle down and live with them."

Today's netroots activists, by contrast, have grown up in the shadow of conservative power. While they, too, constitute the left end of America's political spectrum, today that entire spectrum tilts much further to the right. McGovern wanted to cut America's defense budget by 37 percent; Lamont seems perfectly content with Bush's massive post–September 11 buildup. McGovern compared the military's actions in Vietnam to Nazi Germany; Lamont repeatedly calls American troops heroes. McGovern didn't merely urge the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Vietnam; he wanted to withdraw them from South Korea, too. Lamont, by contrast, is so desperate to prove that his opposition to Iraq does not imply some larger dovish orientation that he recently told *The Hartford Courant* that he considered North Korea an "imminent danger" to the United States—a statement that, if taken seriously, would imply preemptive military action.

To be sure, one of Lamont's major backers, MoveOn, opposed even the Afghan war. But, rather than boasting of that opposition, MoveOn now denies it. And, in general, Lamont's supporters don't attack Iraq as the logical outgrowth of the war on terrorism (as McGovern did with Vietnam and the cold war); they attack Iraq as a *distraction* from the war on terrorism. McGovernism constituted a rebellion against the ideology that had governed U.S. foreign policy for a quarter-century. Lamontism, by contrast, constitutes a rebellion against one war and one president, anchored by no larger ideological critique whatsoever.

For today's Democratic Party, that is both good and bad news. Fortunately, unlike the McGovernites, Lamont and most of his high-profile supporters don't articulate a broadly dovish worldview. Unfortunately, they don't articulate much of a worldview at all. Netroots activists call this a strength, saying that what binds them is not ideology but partisanship. But, without ideological content, partisan loyalty is vacuous if not amoral—the mere pursuit of power. In their netroots manifesto, *Crashing the Gates*, über-bloggers Markos Moulitsas and Jerome Armstrong offer reams of suggestions for how Democrats can control Washington but say virtually nothing about what it means to be a Democrat. They fetishize the conservative movement's organizational success since the 1970s without realizing that it was ideological coherence, achieved in the 1950s, which made that success possible.

It is the absence of such a worldview that allows Lamont to wax hawkish about North Korea while urging near-immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq. And that allowed congressional Democrats to demagogue the Dubai ports deal, even as they criticized the Bush administration for alienating Arab public opinion. Lamont's critics are wrong: Ideologically, he is not Carl Maxey, and his supporters are not mostly McGovernites. The greater danger is that he is Jimmy Carter or Michael Dukakis, and his supporters are like the Democrats who wandered in the post-Vietnam, pre-Clinton intellectual wilderness: able to describe the conservative vision they abhor but not the liberal alternative they propose. **PETER BEINART**

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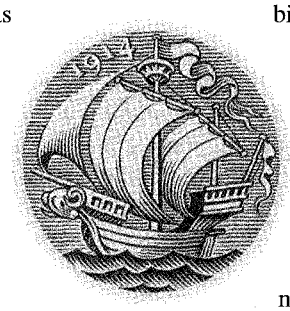
Irresolution

Was Israel defeated in Lebanon? No, but yes. Alright, yes. Israel's 34 days at war with Hezbollah certainly constituted the most mediocre military performance in Israel's history, but it was not the debacle that Hassan Nasrallah says it was. His boasting about victory has more to do with his attempt to make himself king of Lebanon than with any truthful reckoning of his losses. The blow to Hezbollah, in personnel and munitions and infrastructure, was severe. And the political price that the movement may pay inside Lebanon for bringing the wrath of Israel down upon the poor country is still unclear.

But such praise is crushingly faint. There is no denying it. All the forgoing considerations are consolations, nothing more. For the fact is that the wrath of Israel is precisely what was *not* visited upon Hezbollah. In a whole month of fighting, Israel made no significant change in the battlefield. The crowing about the capture of Bint Jbail is embarrassing—the severity of the combat there notwithstanding. In this war, Israel's political and military leadership projected only ambivalence and indecision. It fought Hezbollah in the bankrupt style of Donald Rumsfeld, venerating air power and scanting ground troops. Meanwhile hundreds of rockets were rained upon Israel's northern region day after day, week after week. It is often said that generals should not fight the last war, but it is one of the lessons of this dismal operation that sometimes they should: Ehud Olmert and his war Cabinet were so haunted by the memory of Israel's last campaign in Lebanon that they were inhibited in the prosecution of this campaign, as if a formidable ground assault on Hezbollah must lead inexorably to years of hellish occupation. This was not a failure of power, but a failure of will; more specifically, of the will to use power. There are many kinds of defeat, and the defeat that Israel suffered along its northern frontiers is certainly not the worst kind; but the inconclusiveness of the outcome of this conflict nonetheless stands as a defeat. The reckoning in Israel is already virulent, and it has only just begun.

The military fiasco was compounded by a diplomatic fiasco. The United Nations arranged a deal between Israel and Lebanon, which Israel accepted; but the war was not between Israel and Lebanon. It was between Israel and Hezbollah. The deal called for Hezbollah to lay down its arms and for the Lebanese army to assert itself in southern Lebanon, where the sway of the Lebanese state has never reached. But no sooner was the cease-fire declared than Hezbollah announced that it would not lay down its arms, and the Lebanese government announced that it would not force it to do so. Give these people a Nobel Prize! U.N. Resolution 1701 was designed to fulfill the flouted U.N. Resolution 1559, which two years ago prescribed the disarmament of Hezbollah and the extension of Lebanese authority all the way to its border with Israel. Now, U.N. Resolution 1701 is being flouted, and what next? Another resolution? The dark comedy of resolution and irresolution at the United Nations continues.



To be sure, Hezbollah proved to be a more formidable force, better equipped and better trained, than anybody expected it to be; and Americans increasingly perplexed by the vicissitudes of our own war in the Middle East must agree that these wars of counterinsurgency are very difficult enterprises. The legend of the Six Day War offers no guidance through such difficulties. But was a successful Thirty Day War really beyond the capability of Israel? One hundred fifty-seven Israelis and 842 Lebanese were killed—for what, exactly? A new debate about deterrence? The moral justice of Israel's struggle against Hezbollah is no solace for its military outcome. Israel was right, and Israel botched it.

Whether or not Hezbollah won this war, Iran did. It encouraged and supported Hezbollah in this catastrophic mischief, and it emerges from the adventure satisfied with its ability to hurt Israel and damage regional stability and thwart American strategy. At this moment, therefore, it is important to remember that Iran is not only Israel's problem. It is also America's problem. Indeed, it is the West's problem. There is no figure in the world right now—not Osama bin Laden, not Nasrallah, not Ayman Al Zawahiri, not the Sunni insurgency or the Shia death squads in Iraq, not the cells, Al Qaeda or otherwise, in any European or American city—that represents the Islamist danger more perfectly, with greater ideological and physical force, than Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. And he has been enjoying his summer immensely. ■

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Lieberman's do-over.

After Party

BY JASON ZENGERLE

ON THE FIRST weekend in more than 40 years that Joe Lieberman did not find himself comfortably ensconced in the bosom of the Connecticut Democratic Party, he celebrated. The occasion wasn't his estrangement from Nutmeg State Democrats, which stemmed from his decision to run as an independent following his defeat by Ned Lamont in the party primary five days earlier. Rather, it was his daughter Rebecca's wedding in Manhattan.

The wedding was a fitting symbol of the bad political judgment that led to Lieberman's primary defeat. The blessed event was originally scheduled for the previous weekend, two days before the primary—as if it never occurred to anyone in the Lieberman camp that the senator might draw a serious primary challenger and thus be busy campaigning that Sunday. Once Lamont emerged as that serious challenger, the wedding was moved to the weekend after the primary—as if it never occurred to anyone in the Lieberman camp that the senator might actually lose, casting a bit of a pall over the nuptials.

As it turned out, Lieberman had some cause for celebration despite his primary loss. Odd though it may seem, the last week had in some ways been the best seven days of Lieberman's campaign. The stretch began the previous Sunday night, when Lieberman delivered the speech his campaign advisers had been urging him to make for months—criticizing President Bush for his handling of the war in Iraq and attesting to the "heavy responsibility" Lieberman felt, as a supporter of the war, to end it quickly. Two days later, on Election Day, Lieberman managed to exceed expectations, losing to Lamont by 4 percentage points when polls had shown him trailing by as much as 13 points five days earlier. That night, while conceding defeat, Lieberman gave a rousing address reiterating his intention to run as an "independent Democrat" and pledging himself to "a new politics of unity and purpose"; Lamont, meanwhile, gave a clunker of a victory speech that was made worse by the visual of Al Sharpton standing directly behind him. The next day, Lieberman, not Lamont, was the featured guest on the network morning shows. And, on Thursday, when Lamont was taking a post-primary rest at his Maine vacation home, Lieberman was stumping in Waterbury and dominating Connecticut news coverage.

"It was critical for there not to be a vacuum," explains a Lieberman adviser. "Instead, he came out and very confidently and strongly explained his reasons for going on." Confirmation of that view seemed to come on Saturday, courtesy of the first post-primary Connecticut Senate poll: In a three-way general election race, it showed Lieberman holding a 46 to 41 percent lead over Lamont (with the Republican candidate Alan Schlesinger snagging an irrelevant 6 percent).

Lieberman's handling of his historic defeat has for now quieted the talk—which was rampant in the days leading up to the primary—that he would have to abandon his independent bid. And, in that respect, his independent candidacy has cleared its first hurdle. As one Democratic strategist who works for a 2008 presidential hopeful puts it, "If the bottom doesn't fall out in the first ten days, he's obviously got a shot. That was obviously the question: Having lost, having become a pariah in his own party, is he DOA? But it looks like he's got a pulse." Which leads to the next obvious question: How strong a pulse is it?

THE MOST BASIC challenge currently confronting Lieberman's campaign is manpower—because, at the moment, it doesn't have much. In the wake of his primary defeat, Lieberman fired almost all of his senior campaign staff. The move obviously reflected the candidate's displeasure with the way his campaign had been conducted; but it also spared Lieberman the humiliation of having much of his staff quit on him—which almost certainly would have happened, given the fact that many of them could not afford to be associated with a campaign that is now trying to defeat the rightful Democratic nominee. Call it the "Scarlet J"—the sense among many Democratic political professionals that working for Independent Joe could be career suicide.

That sense, of course, will complicate Lieberman's efforts to field a new campaign team—including the crucial hires of a pollster and a media firm. "The complaint against Lieberman during the primary was that he surrounded himself with a group of campaign staff who were neophytes and weren't up to the task," says one former Lieberman adviser. "But now he has a new problem: He recognizes the task before him. The question is whether he can attract the staff necessary to meet that challenge."

So far, it appears to be a mixed bag. His new communications director, Dan Gerstein—who worked in Lieberman's Senate office and on his ill-fated presidential campaign before starting his own consulting business—has drawn largely enthusiastic reviews from Lieberman supporters, who believe he brings an aggressive and pugilistic style that was sorely missing from Lieberman's primary campaign. Under Gerstein, the Lieberman campaign's communications shop—which seemed to wither under the fusillade of attacks from liberal bloggers during the primary—will likely give as good as it gets. But new campaign manager Sherry Brown—Lieberman's longtime state director—is a controversial and unpopular figure in Lieberman-land, where some specifically blame her for the senator's primary defeat. (As state director, it was her job to prevent Lieberman from having a primary challenger.)

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One factor could make hiring a new campaign team easier: Lieberman should be able to pay them top dollar. Despite his primary defeat, fund-raising likely won't be a problem. In fact, his defeat may actually help—in that it could spur Republican donors, particularly those who like Lieberman's views on Israel, to contribute to his campaign. The Lieberman campaign refuses to divulge how much money it has raised since last Tuesday's primary (Lieberman finished the primary campaign with $2 million in his campaign treasury), but anecdotal reports suggest it may be substantial. Sean Smith, who managed Lieberman's primary campaign, says that, on his final day in Lieberman's employ, the donations were pouring in. "The day after the primary, the phone was ringing off the hook," Smith recalls. "And most of the people calling were saying they wanted to contribute money."

ONCE LIEBERMAN ADDRESSES his staff issues, he'll have to turn to strategic ones. Specifically, he'll have to figure out what it means to be an "independent Democrat" committed to a "politics of unity and purpose." Chances are, it will mean deemphasizing the former in favor of the latter. "He's not going to try and hide the fact that he's a Democrat," says a Lieberman adviser. "But he's not running in the Democratic primary—he's not going to be leading with party affiliation." Or, as one former Lieberman adviser puts it: "Now he's appealing to a different set of voters who may not give a shit if he caucuses with the Democrats or considers himself a Democrat."

At the same time, Lieberman will likely try to make an issue out of Lamont's partisanship. "The liberal primary handcuffs are off and he can talk about the full range of issues and highlight Lamont's more extreme views," says the Lieberman adviser. "It's going to be an interesting dance for [Lamont] to show that he's a mainstream leader when he's got Al Sharpton standing over his shoulder."

But it's going to be an interesting dance for Lieberman, as well, if he's going to try to paint a relatively mainstream Democrat like Lamont as an extremist while at the same time maintaining his own ties to the Democratic Party. Already, Lieberman took a bad step when, two days after the primary and in the wake of the London terrorist arrests, he said that Lamont's call for an immediate withdrawal from Iraq "will be taken as a tremendous victory by the same people who wanted to blow up these planes in the plot hatched in England."

Gerstein defends Lieberman's comments: "He didn't politicize national security. He talked about the implications of the position that Ned Lamont is advocating." But other Lieberman supporters were appalled. "It's beneath him to suggest that terrorists in London are going to be encouraged by something Ned Lamont says," says one prominent Democrat supporting Lieberman's independent bid. A Democratic strategist is more pointed still: "What, he's going to be more vicious attacking Ned Lamont than he was attacking Dick Cheney during that terrible debate in 2000?"

Indeed, it's likely that, if Lieberman continues with the attacks on Lamont as soft on defense and weak on terrorism, senior Democrats will begin pressuring him—something they have so far refrained from doing. "I think he'll get phone calls from [Connecticut Senator Chris] Dodd and Bill Clinton at a minimum telling him that what he's doing is not helpful to the party," says another Democratic strategist. "I think he'd listen to them. If Al Gore were to make that phone call, I don't think it would go over that well."

Lieberman's independent candidacy could hurt the Democrats in more concrete ways, too. In particular, Lieberman's continued candidacy will likely provide ideological cover to the three congressional Republicans in Connecticut who face stiff Democratic challenges and who can burnish their "moderate" credentials by linking themselves to Lieberman. (Embattled Representative Christopher Shays has already endorsed Lieberman in the general.) Lieberman, meanwhile, probably won't lift a finger to help the three Democratic challengers since, after the primary, they all endorsed Lamont. "They're going to stay out of our way," says former Connecticut Democratic Party Chairman John Droney, who's supporting Lieberman's independent campaign, "and we're going to stay out of theirs."

WHICH RAISES PERHAPS the most fundamental question about Lieberman's independent bid: Will he still be a Democrat when it's over? To win the election, Lieberman won't have to be much of one. As Droney explains, "He needs to get 40 percent of Connecticut Democrats and then 40 to 50 percent of everybody else." The endorsements Lamont received after his primary victory from prominent Democrats, Droney adds, likely won't have "any impact on the race. ... If that were the case, every Democrat would have voted for Joe in the primary because he had Bill Clinton."

But, if the Democratic establishment lining up behind Lamont doesn't take an electoral toll on Lieberman, it could take a psychological one. "I think he believes a lot of his colleagues are doing what they have to do publicly, and he sort of expected it," says one former Lieberman adviser. Still, "there's definitely been a growing sense of hurt, since at least 2003 and his presidential campaign, about the way parts of the party have treated him."

Others in Lieberman's circle think that the senator's sense of hurt could grow—and that his Democratic identity could wither—even more. "I know that, in his heart of hearts, he considers himself a Democrat, but it'll be interesting to see how he feels when this is all over and done with," says one Lieberman friend. "Over the next three months, he's going to be embraced by Republicans and spurned by the organized Democratic Party, including a lot of people he considers to be his friends. It's hard to say how much that's going to affect him, but he wouldn't be human if it didn't." ■

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Beirut Dispatch

Crying Shame

BY ANNIA CIEZADLO

DURING THE WAR, most of Lebanon's days and nights were dominated by Israeli bombs, Hezbollah missiles, or both. But Monday, August 7, belonged to Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. A grim-looking career banker, Siniora has been in office for just over a year, and this war came at him the same way it hit everyone else: like a sucker punch. For three and a half weeks, he shuttled from meeting to meeting, trying to enlist allies for his war-torn country. That Monday, he finally managed to gather in Beirut the foreign ministers of the 22-member Arab League, some of whose key members had pointedly snubbed his earlier appeals for help.

His voice shaking, Siniora delivered a passionate speech to the ministers, who sat around a table looking uncomfortable. He called on them to keep Lebanon from being Israel's "punching bag" and alluded to his country's long-suffering status as the battleground for regional wars. He spoke of massacres, martyrs, and the destruction of the country's infrastructure; at that point, some 500 Lebanese civilians and 35 soldiers had been killed. And then he broke down. Weeping, he said he had just heard of another Israeli bombing, in a village called Houla, in which 40 people were believed killed (it turned out to be only one). The Arab foreign ministers bowed their heads, either from courtesy or shame.

If Lebanon's strength is its weakness, as the old saying goes, then Siniora's moment of weakness was his strength. His tear-filled plea was all anybody could talk about that day. "When I saw him crying, I could tell he had a big heart, that he felt the same pain we all do," exclaimed my newspaper vendor, Khalil Youssef, placing his hand on his heart. Until the war, middle-class Lebanese like Youssef loathed Siniora. As a former finance minister and technocrat, he was a national Scrooge—the man who inaugurated the country's value-added tax (VAT) and tried to raise it again this May.

As the war ground on, however, that changed. Siniora turned out to be an unexpected statesman for Lebanon, producing a masterful seven-point plan for ending the war. With his fervent speeches, he began to emerge as a counterweight to Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's charismatic leader. Nasrallah rejoiced in the battlefield sacrifice of his own son; Siniora wept over the deaths of children who weren't even his own. "Gradually in the crisis, up to this speech with the Arab leaders, he has certainly become a very viable prime minister," says Jamil Mroue, the publisher and editor-in-chief of Beirut's English-language *Daily Star* newspaper.

But now that the war is over—or at least in remission—Siniora's real work begins. Lebanon's safety, as well as Israel's, depends on him. The question is whether he can manage the peace as well as he handled the war. Can he control Hezbollah and hold his broken country together? Or will it keep exploding into armed conflict? To find the answer, which is not encouraging, you have to understand how the weakness of the Lebanese state has only strengthened Hezbollah.

BORN IN 1943, Siniora came of age during the 1950s, the golden age of Arab nationalism. He remains an ardent Arab nationalist to this day, say friends and family—a lover of his mother tongue who memorizes verses by the 10th-century poet Al Mutanabbi. He attended the American University of Beirut (AUB), then a hotbed of progressive pan-Arab ideals. "Those were times of big dreams and great hopes of things changing—mass movements, demonstrations. People could change regimes at those times," says Fawwaz Traboulsi, a professor of history and political science at the Lebanese American University, who attended AUB with Siniora. "And he's very much related to that tradition."

But post–civil war Lebanon was a far cry from the pan-Arab dreams of Siniora's youth. Syria had assumed control of a political system that is inherently weak: Instead of a simple majority, it requires a government of squabbling factions to reach a consensus before making any decision. In 1992, then–Prime Minister Rafik Hariri tapped Siniora, a close friend from the same hometown, as minister of state for finance, and then finance minister. In both positions, Siniora's job was to tighten his boss's purse strings.

An expansive, free-spending tycoon who often greased his negotiations with cash, Hariri was adept at navigating the fissures between rival sects. As the leader of the Sunnis, he could negotiate with Nasrallah—the leader of the Shia—as an equal. But Siniora's attempts to modernize the Lebanese economy pitted him against Hariri's political foes, and the only significant economic reforms he managed to impose were ones that squeezed the country's disappearing middle class. By the time Hariri left office in 2004, Lebanon had a $36 billion public debt—at 170 percent of GDP, one of the highest, proportionally, in the world.

Siniora became a national symbol of government heartlessness. After he imposed the country's 10 percent VAT, a popular Lebanese talk show invited him to appear on a Christmas special and then staged a scene straight out of *A Christmas Carol*: The host took the finance minister to the home of a very poor Christian family (with a disabled son) that was having trouble making ends meet. Confronted with this tableau, Siniora did something that convinced viewers he was either a kindhearted man or a weak one: He cried.

Annia Ciezadlo is a Beirut-based writer.

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In February 2005, Hariri was assassinated in a massive bombing, a violent coda to a decade-long cold war between him and Lebanon's pro-Syrian president, Emile Lahoud. By then, Siniora had already returned to his first career, that of a private banker. "He decided to get out of politics," his son Wael told me. "He doesn't want it anymore; he never wanted it in the first place." For the next several months, young Lebanese camped out in downtown Beirut, and, through mass demonstrations and international pressure, eventually forced Syria to withdraw its troops. After elections in June, the new anti-Syrian parliamentary majority appointed Siniora.

As prime minister, he got a second chance to pursue economic and political reforms. He pledged to revise Lebanon's electoral law and to finally get the country into the World Trade Organization. But, once again, Lebanon's consensus-based political system—even more fractious without the powerful Syrian tiebreaker—foiled Siniora's attempts to push through changes.

Unlike Hariri, Siniora doesn't have billions of dollars or thousands of votes to dispense. He's not the representative of a religious sect, like Nasrallah, or a *zaim*, one of the hereditary lordlings who make up most of Lebanon's political class. He's not even the head of his own party: That role goes to Saad Hariri, Rafik's son. "Siniora does not have a power base; he's not a member of parliament, he's not a *zaim*," says Traboulsi. "So real power is somewhere else. ... That's a very fragile situation for someone like Siniora."

Hezbollah took full advantage of Siniora's weakness. Last December, when the government made a key decision by majority rule, not consensus, five Shia ministers—all members of Hezbollah or its ally, Amal—stalked out of the Cabinet. They refused to return until Siniora declared that Hezbollah was not a militia—thus protecting it from being disarmed under U.N. Resolution 1559. After nearly two months, Siniora made a statement worthy of Gertrude Stein: "We have never called, and will never call, the resistance by any other name but the resistance, and it is a national resistance, and we will not use any other expression to describe it but national resistance," he said. This tortured statement, said Hezbollah parliamentarian Mohammed Raad, was "synonymous with what we demanded."

As the year dragged on, Hezbollah continued to keep the new prime minister in line: At the Arab League summit in Khartoum, in late March, Siniora tried to rewrite a statement supporting "Lebanon's resistance"—a clear reference to Hezbollah—to the more ambiguous "Lebanese people's right to resistance." Lahoud erupted into a tirade, and Siniora lost face yet again. And, in May, when Siniora tried to impose an economic austerity program, which would have raised the VAT and gasoline taxes, Hezbollah and its allies staged a huge rally in downtown Beirut. The protest was mainly a show of strength: The government had already rescinded the most unpopular of Siniora's proposed changes.

As soon as the August 14 cease-fire took effect, Nasrallah, with great fanfare, pledged to help people rent apartments, rebuild their homes, and even furnish them. But, after Israel's relentless bombing of Lebanese infrastructure, Siniora's government is more broke than ever—leaving the Lebanese with no question of whom to thank and whom to blame. "Our government, they take the VAT and they give nothing back," says Qassem Youssef, a stocky 34-year-old shopkeeper from Tyre. "This is not our government. This is the government of a different country. But it is like ice: It will melt soon. It will be water."

IN A SMALL hotel room in West Beirut, the Rikans—one extended family among close to a million Lebanese who fled the Israeli bombing—are taking refuge. Two pretty, curly-haired daughters flit around the room, playing with plastic dolls and eating peanuts. Their father, Khalil, perches on the cabinet next to the television, which silently flashes with pictures of Siniora, George W. Bush, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, and other faces of the war. The Rikans haven't gotten much help from Siniora's government, and they don't expect to. "Our government is bankrupt; they don't have any money," says Muhammad Rikan, Khalil's father, who is propped up in bed in his pajamas.

"If they get money from outside, maybe they'll give us a little of it," says Khalil with wry hopelessness.

"We're not expecting anything from them," says his father. "We'll be very happy if they don't take our house!"

But, for all this, Nisrine Salih, the girls' eager, talkative young mother, was moved when she saw Siniora cry; she identified with him. "We saw that he was in the same situation as the people," she says. Siniora's tears showed the Shia that somebody in the government—a Sunni, no less—gave a damn about them. The Rikans see Siniora as like them: helpless.

Siniora's impotence is a product of the Lebanese political system, not any personal weakness of character. As a technocrat, he's exactly the kind of leader Lebanon needs; unfortunately, the country's political system makes it almost impossible for this kind of man to be effective. His tears won him respect, even affection, from the Lebanese. But getting people to like you isn't power—especially in Lebanon, where votes matter less than behind-the-scenes deals. As the idealistic Arab nationalist who cried for the Shia, Siniora has the personality to transcend the sectarian limits of Lebanese politics. But he doesn't—at least, not yet—have the power.

"He's very good—obviously he has a very lovely personality. The people liked him when he cried," says Khalil Gebara, co-director of the Lebanese Transparency Association, an anti-corruption watchdog group. "But he is very unlucky, because he's to blame for everything that happens, especially for things beyond his control. Who's to blame for the VAT? Who's to blame for all the corruption and all the debt? Siniora. Now who's to blame for everything in the war? Siniora. Everyone blames him for everything. So he cries." ■

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Haifa Dispatch

Close Quarters

BY YOSSI KLEIN HALEVI

THE ARAB WAITER in the hummus restaurant was explaining to me why Israel was the aggressor in Lebanon when the air-raid siren went off. We were in Wadi Nisnas, Haifa's Arab quarter near the city's port, where several Katyushas had fallen and whose old stone buildings aren't equipped with shelters. The waiter led the half-dozen Jewish and Arab patrons into the small kitchen. "The walls are thick," he explained. We were pressed so closely we almost touched. "Co-existence," said a Jewish woman wryly. When a few minutes passed without a boom, we returned to our tables, and I resumed my argument with the waiter.

With the cease-fire in Lebanon, Israel's Jewish and Arab citizens emerge from a traumatic month more wary toward one another than at any time before. Though Jews and Arabs shared a common fate—a third of the 40 Israeli civilians killed by Katyushas were Arabs—their perceptions about who is responsible for the war are diametrically opposite. While almost all Jews supported the war and many saw it as an existential test of Israeli deterrence, almost all Arabs opposed the war and many blamed Israel for provoking Hezbollah.

And yet, what's remarkable about Haifa—which was hit by over 150 Katyushas—is that this Arab-Jewish city has managed to preserve a sense of neighborly decency. Unlike Israel's other mixed cities, such as Tel Aviv–Jaffa or Haifa's impoverished neighbor, Acre, here Jews and Arabs are at ease in one another's company. "I lived in Tel Aviv for a year and encountered lots of racism, but never in Haifa," a university student named Tauwfik told me. Arabs and Jews share the same apartment buildings, where notices are posted in Hebrew and Arabic; they work together and eat in the same restaurants. Every December, the city celebrates the "Festival of Festivals," honoring Hanukkah, Christmas, and Ramadan, and hundreds of thousands from around the country come to hear Arab and Jewish street musicians and stroll along the "Co-existence Walk" through Haifa's old neighborhoods. "[Hezbollah leader Hassan] Nasrallah hates Haifa's co-existence," says Hani Elfar, associate director of the Beit Hagefen interfaith center. "Maybe that's why he targeted us. We represent the opposite of everything he stands for."

Elsewhere, Jewish Israel tends to fear the Arab minority as a potential fifth column, part of the region's hostile majority. But Haifa celebrates its Arabs, who make up 13 percent of the city's population of 270,000. Affixed to stone walls along the Co-existence Walk are municipality-sponsored posters featuring the city's Arab as well as Jewish authors; streets are routinely named for prominent Arabs. "Where else in cities with a Jewish majority do you see such things?" says Elias Mtanes, an Arab city council member with the left-wing Zionist Meretz Party. "The message is that we are rooted here, that our presence is respected."

Nor are the gestures merely symbolic. About 20 percent of the nearly 13,000 students of the University of Haifa are Arab—the largest ratio in any of Israel's seven major universities. The university provides private tutoring for Arab students, many of whom struggle with the transition from Arabic-language high schools in Galilee villages to a Hebrew-speaking university in the big city. "We are a laboratory for working out majority-minority relations," says University President Aaron Ben Zeev, who, for the last month, has been watching Katyushas fall in the city below his twenty-seventh-floor office in the campus tower atop Mount Carmel. "It's not a coincidence that we've had fewer political tensions [between Arab and Jewish students] than other campuses. It's the result of much holistic work. It's not all kissing and hugging here, but it isn't that way in a marriage, either."

WHAT MAKES HAIFA work isn't only the overtures of its Jews but also the responsiveness of its Arabs, who tend to adapt Israeli norms more readily than Arab Israelis elsewhere. Though Wadi Nisnas is almost entirely Arab, Hebrew newspapers are sold in kiosks here and shopkeepers play Hebrew music. When they're among Jews, many young Arabs Hebraize their first names. Even as they criticize government policy, they speak of Israel as "our state." And, crucially, they tend to be sensitive to Jewish fears. Though expressions of support for Hezbollah are common among Arab Israelis—one Arab Knesset member endorsed Hezbollah's kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers—Haifa's Arabs are careful not to provoke their Jewish neighbors.

One reason for this sensitivity is that a majority of the city's Arabs are Christian. "We don't like to talk about it because it only alienates Muslims," says a Christian interfaith activist, "but the Christian majority helps diffuse tensions. We know how to get along with everyone."

Haifa's interfaith sensitivities are further bolstered by the presence of the universal-minded Bahai, whose world center is in Haifa and who revere it as a holy city. While Bahai are persecuted as heretics in much of the Muslim world, Haifa's Muslim leaders, along with clergy of other faiths, routinely participate in Bahai events. The city's skyline is dominated by the Bahai's gold-domed shrine, which has become Haifa's unofficial symbol.

I asked Haifa's mayor, Yona Yahav, why co-existence works better in his city than in other mixed Arab-Jewish areas. "I think it's because Haifa was spared a visit by Moses, Jesus, or Mohammed," he says. "There are no holy places to fight over. The only prophet among the three religions who visited here was Elijah, but he is accepted by all the faiths."

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On a narrow, hilly street in Wadi Nisnas, Christian and Muslim neighbors gathered before a two-story house hit by a Katyusha. Though the attack, which killed two residents, had happened days before, the neighbors stared in silence, unable to accept that their city had become a war zone. Debris from what had been the building's stone façade was piled in the yard; a porch hung crooked, seemingly about to collapse. The exposed walls were pockmarked with holes caused by ball bearings placed in Katyushas to maximize the devastation—a tactic borrowed from suicide bombers. Yet a glass-enclosed poster affixed to a stone wall remained intact: It was for one of the exhibits along the Co-existence Walk, and it featured the late Haifa writer and Palestinian nationalist Emile Habibi.

Family members emerged from the ruins, carrying boxes filled with mementos like framed photographs. I asked one of them, a young man named Johnnie, whether Hezbollah is to blame for the murder of his relatives. "The suffering on both sides pains me," he says. "Everyone here has family in Lebanon. War isn't a soccer game. There are no winners—only losers."

A Muslim neighbor remarks that he had sent his family out of Haifa after Nasrallah had urged Haifa's Arabs to flee the city to allow him to attack without harming his fellow Arabs. "Nasrallah said he didn't want to shed the blood of his own," he explains.

"And we're not the same blood?" demands a Jewish security guard dispatched to watch over the site. "Only you and Nasrallah? We all share the blood of our father, Abraham. Like it or not, we're stuck with each other." ■

John Bolton defended.

Bully Pulpit

BY MARTIN PERETZ

The last nominee for ambassador to the United Nations about whom *The New York Times* was frantic was Daniel Patrick Moynihan. In fact, it was frantic about him twice. The first time was in November 1970, when Moynihan's name was, for a brief moment, floated as a likely candidate. The *Times* was quick to declare him the "WRONG MAN FOR THE U.N." The right man was Charles Yost, a foreign servant for nearly four decades so discreet as to be almost invisible.

Moynihan never made clear why he did not then take the post. Did he initially decline it because of the opposition mustered against him on West 43rd Street? Who knows. In the end, President Nixon, who had asked Eugene McCarthy to take the post before Moynihan, sent the name of George Bush *père* to the Senate—and, as Moynihan quipped in his book *A Dangerous Place* (which is what he considered the United Nations), the *Times* did not say he was the wrong man.

After serving (quite magnificently) for two years as ambassador to India (in the tradition of John Kenneth Galbraith), Moynihan was named to the U.N. post by President Ford. Again, the *Times* found fault with the designee: "[T]he prospect of Mr. Moynihan at Turtle Bay has aroused among some friends of the United Nations genuine doubts about United States policy toward the world organization, and especially toward third world countries." The *Times* was carrying on what one could only call a vendetta against Moynihan for what were then surprising insights on race but are now—forgive the metaphor—white bread. But Moynihan was confirmed. I can still recall the bitter derision of the foreign affairs elite at Moynihan's insistence on putting the United States "in opposition" to the malevolent bargains the Soviets were then making with "the nonaligned," that label itself a lie.

The present envoy to the United Nations, John Bolton, has served as a recess appointment since the summer of 2005, not because he couldn't get a majority of the Senate to back him (he could) but because the majority leadership couldn't manage the 60 votes to block a filibuster. (When I was a child, liberal Democrats saw the filibuster as anti-democratic and reactionary.) President Bush is once again dispatching Bolton's name to the Senate. And, once again, the *Times* is apoplectic. Last year, it editorialized, "[T]his may be the first time a world superpower has used its top United Nations post as a spot for the remedial training of a troublesome government employee."

But the fact is that Moynihan and Bolton were cut from the same cloth: a bit pugnacious in their patriotism, realistic about the moral and practical limits of world-organization diplomacy, clear-headed about the fact that some nations sitting across the table from us at the United Nations are actual enemies. Bolton understands, as Moynihan did, the futility of the U.N.'s grand bureaucracies and plastic procedures. When there is a crisis, the U.N. apparatus is mobilized to pass a resolution. A resolution is almost the be-all and end-all of the United Nations. No one seems to pay much attention to the consequences or whether there are consequences at all. Like Resolution 1559, passed two years ago. It stated quite clearly what was supposed to happen in southern Lebanon—namely, the disarming of Hezbollah and all other militias. And let us not forget its requirement that the secretary-general make a report "within thirty days" on progress toward the resolution's goals. Of course, he couldn't have reported more than nothing. This instance of impotence is not an exception to the rule; it is the rule.

An honest U.S. ambassador recognizes the logic of U.N. decision-making. Fred Iklé called it "semantic infiltration." You undermine your position by adopting your adver-

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saries' language. What the U.N. is most often discussing is wording—wording that bridges positions. But these wordings that bridge positions are, as Moynihan understood and Bolton understands, often deep falsifications.

The internationalization of decision-making through the United Nations is said to be the only basis for legitimate decision-making, especially when it comes to the use of force. In Darfur, just as one instance, the internationalization of the process has thus far meant no U.N. force at all. I'd bet that last week's decision not to put Resolution 1701 explicitly under Chapter 7 guidelines will mean that no one will disarm Hezbollah. Verbal compromise turns out to be the refusal to act, or the refusal to act decisively. In any case, Bolton has rejected the basic proposition about the internationalization of decision-making on several occasions. His point was that political legitimacy derives only from democratic processes. Since so few of the states in the United Nations operate through these processes, there is little legitimacy in the United Nations at all, particularly on extreme questions like force.

Now, Bolton has made an issue of the Oil-for-Food scandal, management reform, membership in ancillary agencies (for example, whether notorious human rights–abusing states—like China and Cuba—should be elected to the new U.N. Human Rights Council; they were), and other matters like corruption, the sexually abusive behavior of U.N. peacekeepers, et cetera. It is not that he hasn't accepted compromises. He has. But the American U.N. lobby (there is one) is content, even eager, to leave the bloated, corrupt, and often unethical norms of the organization be. It certainly doesn't want a searchlight focused on them. This lobby is very hostile to Bolton's confirmation.

It is really quite unseemly for the Democratic minority to be stalking Bolton's nomination. It isn't as if the U.N. post is a judicial appointment, where the separation of powers implies greater senatorial prerogatives in exercising "advice and consent." The U.N. ambassador is really a representative of the president in international affairs. Of course, most Democratic senators oppose the president's foreign policy. But they are in the minority. And do they have the right to sabotage a nomination that expresses—for better and for worse—the president's views?

IN THE YEAR he has served, Bolton has been exemplary on many issues, the most significant of which are the Security Council's attempts to persuade North Korea and Iran to suspend their nuclear adventures. His work resulted in unanimity among the five permanent members of the Council. He has riveted the attention of member states on elections in the Congo and the deteriorating circumstances in Burma. He continues to press for more effective initiatives on the genocidal situation in Sudan. Bolton's dexterity resulted in the establishment of both budget and management reforms that were very long overdue. Quotidian, you might say. But his ability to address high issues and routine ones is a rarity in the bureaucracy.

Alas, Bolton was one of James Baker's gang who went to Florida to snatch the state's electoral votes from Al Gore. I personally resent those who engaged in that venture. But the fact is that Bush is now president, and his administration is peopled by many of his enthusiasts who flew to Tallahassee after November 7. Florida is no longer relevant.

Still desperate to finish off Bolton's appointment, his antagonists have fixed on matters of character. He is a "bully," they say. And, indeed, some accounts of his brusque treatment of government intelligence analysts are troubling, if true. But that's now old news. His handiwork in Turtle Bay—co-writing resolutions with France, to take the most recent example—is hardly the mark of a blustering zealot. And do the Democrats imagine that the Clinton administration was all geniality? Do Democrats see Hillary Clinton as amiable? Which brings me to another former U.N. ambassador, Richard Holbrooke—one of the most accomplished diplomats of our time. I hope that the next Democratic president appoints him secretary of state. But, if Bolton is rejected because he's a bully, let me tell you that Holbrooke will have trouble, too. ■

The purging of a war critic.

Reality Bites

BY SPENCER ACKERMAN

THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION has never been known as an intellectually adventurous place. For decades, its policy briefs and studies have closely tracked Republican talking points. So did the opinions of the think tank's senior foreign policy analyst, John Hulsman. In his op-eds and Fox News appearances, he cheerfully whacked the French, John Kerry, and other enemies of the cause.

But all these years of fidelity to the conservative cause couldn't spare Hulsman from suffering the wrath of his comrades. On July 7, his boss, Kim Holmes, sent a note to the Heritage staff wishing Hulsman "the very best in his continuing career." No one at Heritage was fooled by Holmes's euphemistic send-off—least of all Hulsman. "After getting fired," he says, "I was a walking corpse."

Following Holmes's lead, the official line from Heritage is that Hulsman left his job of his own volition. Indeed, two Heritage spokespeople initially denied to me that Hulsman had been shown the door. When I pressed them, both then told me that the think tank doesn't discuss its "human resources policies." The reasons for Hulsman's departure, however, seem perfectly evident. "At Heritage," says Christopher Preble of the Cato Institute, "anything that smacks of criticism of Bush will not be tolerated." And, as the Iraq war faltered, Hulsman grew bold in criticizing administration policy

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in essays and conversations with reporters. Next month, he will co-publish a book with the New American Foundation's Anatol Lieven titled *Ethical Realism*, a scathing indictment of the neoconservative worldview. With his firing, Hulsman joins Bruce Bartlett, the economist who was dismissed by the right-wing National Center for Policy Analysis for his criticisms of Bush, in the ranks of the conservative purged.

And, in the coming months, their ranks will likely grow even larger. Conservative battles over the Iraq war are igniting all across Washington, with opponents loudly assaulting its leading champions (see Francis Fukuyama versus Charles Krauthammer and George Will versus Bill Kristol). But what the Hulsman incident reveals is that the war's supporters aren't about to passively absorb criticism and issue public apologies. They will fight back against their critics—and an ugly debate will become even uglier.

THE EVENING OF HIS dismissal, a stunned Hulsman led a procession of ex-colleagues to Lounge 201, a Capitol Hill martini bar. "We pretty much closed the place," recalls Hulsman. Responding warmly to the respects paid to him by friends, Hulsman quoted Max Fischer, from the dark comedy *Rushmore*, who tells Bill Murray's beaten-down Herman Blume, "I guess you've just gotta find something you love to do and then do it for the rest of your life." Then he decamped to his farm in the Shenandoah Valley.

When I spoke with Hulsman a few weeks later, he told me that a nondisclosure agreement prohibited him from providing details about the terms of his departure. But he was eager to speak about the ideological differences that prompted it. Despite his firing, he says he continues to harbor warm memories of the think tank. When he arrived there in 1999 to revitalize its European studies program, it seemed an intellectually exciting place. "It was always a big tent," he remembers. "There was a sense that you had authoritarians, neocons, realists, and libertarians all bubbling along."

But what Hulsman took for intellectual freedom may simply have been ideological incoherence. In the '90s, no foreign policy doctrine dominated the party. And Hulsman's brand—a dispassionate realism and distaste for both liberal and neoconservative interventionist impulses—resided close to the party's mainstream. That, of course, changed with the Bush administration's response to September 11, which quickly rallied a new conservative consensus.

As that consensus emerged, Hulsman hesitated to buck the administration and repeat his old complaints about moralistic foreign policy. In 2004, several of Hulsman's friends established the Coalition for a Realistic Foreign Policy—a loose anti-neocon confederation of liberal and conservative realists—but he declined to add his name to any of the coalition's manifestos. "People at Heritage said, 'You've gotta be careful signing this,' " Hulsman recounts.

But years of insurgency and general chaos emanating from Iraq emboldened Hulsman finally to vocalize his dissent. Last summer, he and Lieven penned a *National Interest* essay contending that the neoconservatives—and, implicitly, Bush—were "expending blood and treasure for problematic gains such as Iraq" and "significantly retarding America's ability to act against the true barbarians at the gate." In March, Hulsman argued against the arch-neocon Michael Ledeen during a House International Relations Committee hearing on Iran policy. He says he was subsequently informed that he was not to write anything on Iran for Heritage.

Soon after publishing their *National Interest* essay, Hulsman and Lieven signed a deal with Pantheon to expand their argument into a book. "I worried about getting fired, but we keep encouraging people to believe in moral courage, so we had to show some," Hulsman says. As the book's publication date loomed, however, Heritage apparently began worrying about the attention his doctrinal deviations would receive. "They had a desire to see what the book said ahead of time," he says. "I had a desire to say it was none of their business." And, although Hulsman won't say what exactly happened next, that was the end of his affiliation with Heritage.

THE KEY FIGURE in Hulsman's demise seems to be Kim Holmes, who has been the vice president overseeing Heritage's foreign policy program almost continuously since 1992. Holmes is an unlikely defender of neoconservatism. When Kristol and Robert Kagan published their seminal 1996 manifesto, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," Holmes laid waste to it in *Foreign Affairs*, denouncing it as "pure escapism." Throughout the '90s, he sneered at the notion of America as a "global policeman."

But that was before he went to work as the assistant secretary of state for international organization affairs in 2002. Over the next three years, Holmes apparently ditched his old qualms about moralistic foreign policy. And, when he returned to Heritage last summer, he began proselytizing for the Bush doctrine with a convert's zeal. In a speech last April, he contended that "there can be no real security in America without the advance of liberty in the world," an almost word-for-word quote from Bush's second inaugural address. Given Holmes's new outlook, it may have been only a matter of time before Hulsman found himself in his boss' crosshairs. (When I sought comment from Holmes about the Hulsman affair, he first denied that Hulsman was fired and then demanded I give him the name of the Heritage press aide who transferred my call.)

While some believe that Holmes was simply enforcing Bush's prerogatives within the GOP, Hulsman gives his old boss more credit. "Kim began to adhere to the views of the administration," he says. "He sincerely changed his mind." But he predicts that the recriminations at Heritage—and throughout the conservative movement—will soon intensify. "If the midterms go badly, the civil war in the GOP starts the day after," Hulsman says. "The neocons and Kristol will say that Bush is incompetent and the neocons are not to blame." Maybe then it will be Hulsman who leads the next purge. ■

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Duke Cunningham's wife tells all.

Ace in the Hole

BY KITTY KELLEY

RANDY "DUKE" CUNNINGHAM stumbled to the microphone. Heavily medicated, the former congressman from San Diego had to be propped up by federal marshals. He had lost 90 pounds since he pleaded guilty, and his rumpled suit hung on him like a deflated parachute silk. The fearless aviator and war hero who claimed to be the inspiration for the cocky ace played by Tom Cruise in *Top Gun* had vanished.

Standing in his stead on March 3, 2006, was an aging criminal whose droopy hound-dog face crumbled as he admitted taking $2.4 million in bribes from defense contractors. "I did it to myself. I could have said no, and I didn't. It was me, Duke Cunningham." He broke down as he recounted his crimes, including conspiracy to commit bribery, evading taxes, and committing wire and mail fraud. "I will forfeit my freedom, my reputation, my worldly possessions, and, most importantly, the trust of my friends and family."

Cunningham's conviction stands as the worst case of corruption to date involving a member of Congress. "In the sheer dollar amount, it's unprecedented," Deputy House Historian Fred W. Beuttler told the *San Diego Union-Tribune*. The sledgehammer sentence of eight years and four months is also unparalleled. According to the U.S. attorney, it is the longest prison sentence for a former member of Congress, but, then, no member of Congress has roiled the public as brazenly as Duke Cunningham.

Cunningham is a product of the times, in which there are more creative ways to buy off congressmen—including inviting them on lavish junkets, hosting lucrative lobbyist-filled fund-raisers, and funneling money to their spouses and children—than ever before. And there's also a scale of economy that makes it more tempting for congressmen to trade power for money: Lawmakers earn $165,200 per year; the new breed of lobbyists who woo them earn in the millions. But, even in this atmosphere, the brazenness of Cunningham's quid pro quo was unique. The notoriously volatile congressman did little to hide his influence-peddling, even writing up a menu of prices on his congressional stationary—the use of a defense contractor's $140,000 yacht, for example, was the price for delivering a $16 million government contract. He accepted lavish gifts as bribes, including a china hutch, Louis Philippe commodes, and a used Rolls Royce. During poker nights in rented suites at Washington's Watergate Hotel and the Westin Grand, he was also supplied with prostitutes.

What made Cunningham such an eminently corruptible politician? The people close enough to know stayed away from his sentencing, including his son by his first marriage, Todd, 35, and his daughters April, 28, and Carrie, 24. Most noticeably absent was Nancy Cunningham, his wife of 32 years. Cunningham had sworn to the judge that she knew nothing of his perfidy, but, rather than granting her immunity in its criminal investigation, the U.S. attorney deemed her "a person of interest." That vague but ominous legal term cast immediate suspicion and implied a degree of guilt.

Consequently, I did not know what to expect when a friend of Nancy Cunningham's lawyer contacted me. He said she had not talked to anyone in the press, but she would talk to me for THE NEW REPUBLIC because she wanted a national platform for her side of the story. There would be no ground rules to the interview, and she would speak freely about her husband, from whom she is estranged. Her attorney, James A. Macy, explained why: "My client faces an uphill battle as far as people believing she is not part of her husband's conspiracy. I don't believe she benefited from anything Duke did, but every aspect of her life has been affected by the suspicion."

That suspicion is understandable. The night before Duke was sentenced, he dumped a duffel bag full of dirty laundry and $32,000 worth of cash in Nancy's driveway. And what macho *Top Gun* pilot would lust after frilly antiques and Louis Philippe commodes? But, despite the ambiguities surrounding Nancy, she is one of the few people who can answer the most important question of all about Duke Cunningham: Why did he do it?

NANCY CUNNINGHAM'S LAWYER suggested introducing us "girls" in a quiet restaurant at the San Diego Marriott across the street from his office in the Mission Valley neighborhood. From newspaper stories, I had learned of Nancy's impressive credentials. She is bilingual and has two Masters' degrees and a Ph.D. in educational administration. But, when I read that she was suing the government for her "fair share" of equity in the house her husband had bought with bribes, I questioned just how smart this educated woman was. Who in her right mind would take on the federal authorities over that?

When I walked into the restaurant, I half-expected to meet some combination of Ma Barker and Carmela Soprano. Instead, I met a trim, attractive 54-year-old woman with honey blonde hair who looked like the president of the Junior League. Dressed appropriately for a weekday after-

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noon in Southern California, Nancy was wearing black-and-white checked cotton slacks, black sandals, a black twin set, and simple silver jewelry—but no wedding ring. The only discordant note was a capacious black vinyl bag stuffed with legal files, clipping folders, papers, tissues, and bottles of water.

Since the government raid on the Cunningham estate in Rancho Santa Fe, the forced sale of that property, and the public auction of most of her furnishings, Nancy has been living with her dog and her 87-year-old grandmother in a three-bedroom, one-bathroom bungalow in a downtrodden neighborhood. Her lawyer described the house as "a dump—a real dump."

After a few sips of iced tea, he departed and left us alone. Nancy continued her own sad story. Since the scandal began, she had endured picketers from MoveOn, press stakeouts, mounting legal fees, and sneers from co-workers in the Encinitas School District, where she is struggling to hold onto her job as an administrator of support services. "It's been the worst experience of my life," she said. "People are writing to the school board to get me fired and contacting the school system, demanding they examine any budget I've ever had anything to do with." Worst of all, she knows most people consider her as guilty as her husband. Some even blame her for his criminality. "My mother-in-law says I forced him into it: 'He would never be in prison if it hadn't been for you.'"

Nancy vehemently disputed these allegations. She saw herself as an innocent spouse blindsided by a wayward husband, though she chose to equate her misfortune with an arguably more epic one. "I will not let Mr. Cunningham turn me into Pat Nixon," she said. "After Richard Nixon's scandal, she internalized his shame to such an extent that she suffered a stroke and died a miserable death. He got to live long enough to somewhat vindicate himself, but Pat Nixon got nothing. I will not let that happen to me."

Throughout our interview, Nancy referred to her husband as "Mr. Cunningham." "It's a mental distancing," she explained. "As far as I'm concerned, he no longer really exists." But, in this frosty dismissal and her constant Victorian references to "Mr. Cunningham," there was a sense of disappointment. "I have to tell you, I once idolized him," she later confessed. "He was the most charismatic person I ever met." In her recollections of their early days together, Duke mesmerized men as well as women. Despite his later lies and betrayals, she can still see him as the dashing young Navy ace. In weak moments when she isn't wishing him dead, she wonders why someone with "all the promise he once had" ever married someone like herself. "I identify with women like Jacqueline Kennedy and Princess Diana," Nancy said. "They, too, had husbands like that."

NANCY CAN BE forgiven her grandiosity, because there once was a time when Randall Harold Cunningham seemed destined for a life of greatness. In Vietnam, he adopted John Wayne's nickname of Duke as his pilot call name, because he identified with the movie star's swaggering glamour. In 1973, when Nancy met him in the watch room of Miramar Naval Air Station, he was a Top Gun instructor, teaching pilots to do what he had done in Vietnam—dogfight, kill, and escape capture. A year earlier, on a flak suppression mission over North Vietnam, he had been attacked by 22 MiGs. Seeing his wingman under fire, he shot down three of the MiG fighters before he was hit by a SAM 2 missile, which smashed the hydraulics on his jet. Flying 30 miles to reach the ocean, he ejected over the Gulf of Tonkin and was rescued and flown to the USS *Okinawa*. The next day, he became the Navy's first ace in Vietnam. He received the Navy Cross once, the Silver Star twice, the Air Medal 15 times, and the Purple Heart.

Nancy married Duke in 1974. On the surface, the two seemed well-suited. Each had been divorced before meeting; both came from modest means. Her father was a sailor; his was a truck driver. Nancy, 21, and Duke, 32, were the first college graduates in their families. When he proposed, she accepted eagerly. She felt she was marrying up. "Randy was what they called a 'brown shoe.' For years, pilots wore brown shoes, and people like my dad wore black shoes. There was always this pecking order—that pilots were superior to black shoes," Nancy explained.

Both Duke and Nancy shared a desire to move up in the world, although Nancy portrayed Duke as being in a greater hurry to do so. At the time of their engagement, he could not afford to buy his new bride more than a simple gold band with a few diamond chips. So she asked if she could take the 1.5-carat

DAVID COWLES

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diamond from her first marriage and incorporate it into her new wedding band. He agreed, and she selected a simple setting. But Duke wanted her to have something bigger, a little showier, so they spent a few hundred dollars more than she had planned.

Two years after marrying Duke, Nancy filed for divorce and a restraining order. She said in court papers that her husband "is a very aggressive spontaneously assaultive person, and I fear for my immediate physical safety and well-being." She later had a change of heart—"he put on that poor sad-dog face of his," she said—and they reconciled. According to Nancy, he was shell-shocked from his tour in Vietnam and had nightmares about parachuting into waters filled with the bodies of Viet Cong. "When we first married, he slept with a knife under his pillow," she said. "Well, the knife graduated to a loaded gun."

They started their family while Duke was in the Navy working his way up the chain of command. But Nancy claims that her husband's temper got in the way of his advancement. "He was too confrontational with his superiors and got low scores on his fitness reports," she said. He was repeatedly denied promotions, and, according to Gregory Vistica's *Fall From Glory: The Men Who Sank the U.S. Navy*, he was nearly court-martialed for breaking into his commanding officer's files to compare his personnel records with those of fellow pilots. He also demanded the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military award, and then threatened to boycott the ceremony when he learned he was only getting the Navy Cross. "He felt cheated," said his wife. "He said, 'I earned it and I deserve it.' "

When Duke retired from the military in 1987, he and Nancy bought a four-bedroom house in Del Mar, California, for $450,000, which he said would be perfect for fundraisers when he ran for Congress. In the meantime, he started his own business, Top Gun Enterprises, Inc., playing off his show-horse status as the first ace in Vietnam. Through it, he sold Top Gun merchandise, including lithographs of Randy "Duke" Cunningham, books by Cunningham, speeches by Cunningham, tapes by Cunningham, plus a Top Gun official organizational ball cap—a huge seller after the Tom Cruise movie. The most expensive item offered was "The Randy 'Duke' Cunningham Fighter Ace Kalinga Style Buck Knife." Packaged in a hardwood case lined with blue satin, it cost $595.00.

Nancy admired her husband's ability to turn his image into a lucrative brand. "Mr. Cunningham had great entrepreneurial skills," she said. "Everything he touched turned to gold." She rhapsodized about his motivational speaking, which brought in more money than either of them had ever seen. They no longer struggled to make their $1,600 monthly house payments on her salary as a school assistant principal, because he now earned $10,000 for weekend speaking engagements. "He told stories that had a real emotional impact on his audience," Nancy said. "He would relate his flight over Vietnam when he was shot down. He would always begin to cry."

After receiving a personal call from Ronald Reagan in 1989, Duke decided to run for Congress. "I didn't think he had a snowball's chance in hell of winning," said his wife. "But he stopped working and devoted 24/7 to the effort." When Duke officially announced his candidacy, Nancy had her 1976 divorce papers sealed. "I didn't want people to know he slept with a loaded gun under his pillow." The divorce papers remained sealed until the Cunningham scandal broke in 2005 and the *San Diego Union-Tribune* sued to get them released. Nancy went back to court to plead with the judge to keep secret the 25 words dealing with the knife and the gun. The judge granted her request. To show she had nothing to hide or any reason to protect her husband, she revealed them to me for the first time.

FROM THE BEGINNING of his political career, Duke exhibited a take-no-prisoners attitude. During his first congressional campaign primary in 1990, he distributed brochures associating his Egyptian-born opponent with Muammar Qaddafi. In the general election, he hammered the Democratic incumbent, Jim Bates, who was bogged down in a scandal involving charges of sexual harassment. Duke appeared at campaign rallies in his leather bomber jacket and referred to Bates as a "MiG." His posters featured him in his flight suit. He won by one percentage point and arrived in Washington an instant celebrity. Duke bragged to the *Los Angeles Times* that he would conquer Washington, D.C. "We'll, I'm here," he said, surveying his new office in the House of Representatives. "And, when I leave this place in ten or 20 years, I think I'll have left my mark." On that score, he proved prescient.

With Republicans in the majority, Duke received a prize assignment on the House Appropriations Committee; within a few years, he was sitting on the subcommittees for intelligence and defense, overseeing hundreds of millions of dollars in military contracts.

Members of Congress also remember Duke Cunningham's abusive temper, especially toward Democrats. He suggested the Democratic House leadership should be "lined up and shot," something he had earlier recommended for Vietnam war protestors. He called Clinton's labor secretary, Robert Reich, "a communist supporter" because "he goes along with Karl Marx in many of his writings."

During a conference committee debate on illegal immigration, committee Republicans, including Cunningham, prevented Democrats from making any amendments, and Massachusetts Representative Barney Frank responded sarcastically: "I apologize to the gentleman from California for talking about substance." Cunningham shot back, "You want to talk about prostitution rings in basements?" (Six years earlier, Frank, openly gay, had been embroiled in a scandal involving a former male companion who had been caught running a prostitution ring from the congressman's basement apartment.) During a debate over sending troops to Bosnia, Cunningham accused Virginia Representative Jim Moran, who voted against authorizing the presi-

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dent to send U.S. troops to Kuwait, of turning his back on Desert Storm. Moran took a swing at him as they were leaving the House chambers. Moran later told *The Washington Post*: "I thought he had been bullying too many people for too long."

Nancy showed little interest in defending her husband's behavior, which, she said, was an embarrassment to her and her girls. "When I was going to retire and become director of the Rhoades School, I made him promise to stop gay-bashing in public, because it might upset parents at that private school," she said. She recalled when her husband addressed a group of men about his prostate surgery, he said his rectal procedure was "just not natural, unless maybe you're Barney Frank." Frank dismissed Cunningham's comment. "I wouldn't list stability as his strongest personal characteristic," he said. Frank later added, "He tends to frequently blurt out stuff on gay issues. He seems to be more interested in discussing homosexuality than most homosexuals."

The Top Gun congressman drew his harshest fire in 1995, when he objected on the House floor to a pro-environment amendment. He said it was supported by "the same people that would put homos in the military." When former Colorado Representative Patricia Schroeder rose in objection to the remark, he told her, "Sit down, you socialist." Again, Frank expressed contempt for the comment and demanded an immediate apology. Duke's initial refusal to apologize prompted the Human Rights Campaign Fund, the nation's largest gay and lesbian political organization, to call a news conference. Democratic lawmakers lined up to tear him to shreds, and he showed up for the massacre.

"Duke Cunningham, who's standing right here, has been racist, has been homophobic, has been outrageous, and has disrespected his colleagues," said California Representative Maxine Waters. "He should seek some psychiatric help." Duke waited for a turn at the microphone, then said, "To me, using that short term was not wrong, but, if it is offensive, then I apologize and I will not use it again."

DUKE'S TEMPER BECAME a liability as he tried to rise in the ranks of House leadership. According to Nancy, he resented former Speaker Newt Gingrich for ignoring his seniority and appointing people over him who had not been in Congress as long. Former California Representative Ron Packard, who sat with Cunningham on the Appropriations Committee, recalled him becoming irate in a California delegation meeting when he realized he did not have the support for a committee assignment he sought. "He was extremely upset and threatened to quit Congress," said Packard. "That was the first indication that he didn't have control of his emotions." Nancy said her husband became so irate in 2000 about not getting a leadership position that he stormed into Dennis Hastert's office. (Six calls to Hastert's office for confirmation went unanswered.) Looking back, Nancy sees her husband's loss of a leadership position as his final undoing. "He thought he should be at the top, and, when Speaker Hastert promoted people over him, Mr. Cunningham became very, very disturbed," she said.

The government believes that Duke Cunningham started taking bribes in 2000 from defense contractors Brent Wilkes and Mitchell Wade. By helping the men secure government-issued defense contracts, Duke made both of them Enron-rich: Wilkes's firms in California and Virginia raked in about $100 million in ten years, and, since 2002, Wade's Washington-based firm made $150 million. Duke insisted on a piece of the action. His "bribe menu," as the government calls the demands he wrote out on his congressional stationery, detailed how many hundreds of thousands of dollars he expected to be paid for each defense contract he procured. Most of Wilkes's bribes came in the form of cash ($625,000) to pay off Cunningham's mortgages, while Wade's bribes catered to Duke's taste for luxury. The Wade cache included a Victorian china hutch, silver candlesticks, leaded glass doors, Persian and Indian rugs, a sleigh bed, and Restoration and Louis Philippe commodes. There was also a four-wheel-drive Chevy Suburban, a secondhand Rolls Royce (plus $18,000 in repairs), and use of Wade's 42-foot yacht, the *Duke-Stir*, which replaced Duke's first boat, *Kelly C.*, and served as his home for a time.

After I detailed a list of her husband's ill-gotten goods, Nancy dismissed some items as "overpriced" or "not that great," while questioning the government's description of others, such as the Persian rug. "I bought that thing at Costco," she said. As for the rest, she said her husband told her that he had purchased all the antiques in Kensington, Maryland, and negotiated a deal on everything himself. "In high school, Mr. Cunningham worked at a country club and always told me he wanted that lifestyle," Nancy said. "He later learned about antiques from Johnny Cash, who had an extensive collection. But he grew tired of everything he collected and always wanted more."

As "a person of interest," Nancy tried to distance herself from her husband's co-conspirators. "They were his friends, not mine," she said. She begrudgingly acknowledges Mitchell Wade's generosity to her daughters. One summer, the defense contractor paid 19-year-old Carrie Cunningham $4,000 for two weeks' work and gave April Cunningham $2,500 as a wedding present. Nancy's explanation of why these payments failed to raise a red flag revealed her careful study of the type of circles she saw her and her family traveling in. "I know that sounds like a lot of money," she said, "but the Wades were wealthy. A $2,500 check for them was like a $75 check for anyone else."

After Duke began his felonious flight into the high life in 2000, he asked Nancy to join him in Washington. "Mr. Cunningham said he wanted me to be with him more to socialize with lobbyists and defense contractors," she said, adding that the girls were finally grown and graduated from college. In 2002, Nancy was appointed acting chief of staff to the assistant secretary of management in the Department of Education. She denied knowing then that her husband was on the education subcommittee, which approved the

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budget for her salary, but she did admit, "It was a political appointment, pure and simple. ... I had the prettiest office you've ever seen." Her salary was $114,200, more than she had ever made in the public school system.

Before moving to Washington, Nancy said she would not live on her husband's boat, because it made her seasick, so he bought a two-bedroom condominium in Arlington, Virginia. The government claims the $200,000 he paid for that condo came from bribes from two other co-conspirators, New York businessman Thomas Kontogiannis and his nephew, John T. Michael, president of a mortgage company.

If being a congressman hadn't given Duke the power and respect he had imagined, living in Washington as a congressional wife similarly disappointed Nancy. "Don't think there's any prestige in it," she said. "You're just one of 435 wives; there's much more prestige being a congressman's wife in your own district." She cringed walking into Washington parties and seeing young women ogle her husband. "There were many times when Mr. Fun Ball, as I called him, was just too friendly with women—so overly friendly that it was humiliating."

But, while she acknowledges her husband's volcanic temper and relentless need for ego-gratification, she also criticizes the Republican Party for exploiting him for fundraising without reward. She deftly wields a shiv as she discusses traveling with the speaker of the House and his wife on a private plane paid for by Wilkes, one of Duke's unindicted co-conspirators. "I usually told my husband to check everything with Ethics, but it never occurred to me there might be something wrong about flying with Speaker Hastert and his wife. How can it be illegal or unethical if the most important man in Congress does it?" Nancy claimed she went on only one congressional junket—to the Paris Air Show in 2001, an experience she was quick to dismiss. "They are nothing more than fancy vacations for congressional representatives, their families, and staffers to fly in luxury and shop at PX's on military bases and see castles and museums," she said.

Sixteen months after arriving in Washington, D.C., Nancy decided to return to California. She left with few regrets and no illusions about her husband's congressional colleagues. "If you strip away their power, all you've got is a bunch of fat old men with white hair who look like Newt Gingrich and Baby Huey," she groused. "If Newt had kept his pants zipped, the Republicans would not have lost a tremendous leader in the House, which they needed," she added. "And the congressional staffers are just as disgusting, because they bow and scrape to these guys." Nancy blames her husband's staff for keeping her in the dark about his actions. "I feel they deceived me all along about what he was doing." She will not accept that the staff feels they were the ones misled and deceived by her husband. She also feels abandoned by her husband's attorneys at O'Melveny & Myers for not negotiating her immunity. Several attempts to reach Duke's lawyer, K. Lee Blalack III, failed.

IN THE MIDDLE of our first conversation, Nancy demonstrated her frugality when the waiter approached our table. She asked to take home her bowl of tortilla soup. The waiter returned with a six-ounce Styrofoam cup. "This will be my dinner," she said, putting the container in her purse. Eyeing the breadbasket, she delicately removed one small muffin. "My grandmother might like this for breakfast," she added. Envisioning bare cupboards, I suggested she take the whole thing. Nancy hesitated, but, when I assured her again that it was OK, she dumped the breadbasket into her purse.

Throughout our conversation, Nancy was anxious to distance herself from her husband and his opulent tastes, particularly his fateful purchase of their 7,500-square-foot, five-bedroom, eight-bathroom house with a turquoise pool in Rancho Santa Fe. Shortly after Nancy had moved back to San Diego in 2003, Duke flew home and began house-hunting. "He said he wanted more space, but what he really wanted was a more moneyed life. ... It got to be an obsession with him ... the rich people in Fairbanks Ranch and Rancho Santa Fe," she said, naming the district's wealthier communities.

The $2.55 million purchase of the house in Rancho Santa Fe became the tipping point of Duke's crash into corruption. "It was a fixer-upper. I mean, it doesn't look like that from the aerial views—it looks like an absolute Taj Mahal, and I understand that," Nancy said. But my credulity was strained as she struggled to explain how she and her husband parlayed their house in Del Mar into Rancho Taj. "He convinced me that, when he retired from Congress, he would make big money as a lobbyist, so I relaxed a little about the monthly payments," she said. Duke reassured her that, as a member of Congress, he had access to bankers and brokers and could secure any loans necessary. Nancy paused in her recitation to take a breath. Then, she said, "I didn't really want that house and I was an idiot [to go along with it], but he was just hell-bent. He was going to make that purchase or else. ... Trying to be a peacemaker, I gave in." She never believed her husband would "do anything illegal" to get the moneyed life he craved.

But Duke did do something illegal. To finance the purchase, he sold the Del Mar house to a company owned by Mitchell Wade for $1.675 million, which was $700,000 more than it was worth. "Mr. Cunningham told me Mitch needed a place in San Diego to establish a California beachhead for his business, MZM, Inc.," said Nancy. But Wade put the 3,800-square-foot house on the market without ever using it and sold it at a loss seven months later for $975,000. Nancy acknowledges the obvious discrepancy between the purchase price and selling price but maintains the house was fairly priced by her husband. When the sale became front-page news as a conflict of interest in June 2005, she viewed the problem as "just ethical, not criminal." She reiterated that their $2.55 million house in Rancho Santa Fe was "a fixer-upper," far removed from the $15–$30 million estates that gave the community its cachet. "We were never ac-

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cepted there," she added. "We were just poor trash. We were never accepted there, believe it or not."

The next day, she drove me to the sight of the Duke's downfall. As we left the cement curbs and chock-a-block houses of Del Mar, Fords became Jaguars, Mazdas gave way to Mercedes, and the sparsely planted palms soon evolved into a lush landscape of graceful pines, gorgeous orange groves, and bougainvillea. Turning on to Via Del Charro, Nancy pointed to the gated driveway of number 7094. "I haven't been back here since the government raid, and I won't go in," she declared. "I never want to see that house again." While she waited in the car, I jumped out, strolled through the gates, and walked the block-long driveway to see what had thrown Duke Cunningham into the arms of the devil. The white stucco pile was filled with winding staircases and more pillars and palladium glass windows than Monticello. The three-acre spread made Scarlett O'Hara's plantation look anemic, but the Latino crew renovating the property said it would take months to make the house habitable for the new owners. "I told you it was a fixer-upper," Nancy said when I returned.

On the morning of July 1, 2005, Nancy received a call at work informing her that the house had been broken into. She rushed home to find a slew of federal agents with badges and guns wearing white surgical gloves opening closets, pulling out drawers, examining files, and scrutinizing checkbooks. In the middle of the raid, her cell phone rang. "It was Mr. Cunningham. I said, 'Don't come home. They're raiding our house. They're raiding Mitch's office. They're raiding the boat. . . . I don't want you anywhere near here.' " For once, Mr. Cunningham did as he was told.

The government raid marked the public beginning of Duke's downfall. Still, Nancy stood by her man when he announced, later that month, that he was not going to seek reelection. But, abiding by her distinction between unethical actions and criminal ones, when Duke pleaded guilty to felony behavior in November 2005, Nancy decided that she'd had enough. "I said, 'You need to know, Mr. Cunningham, that we now do not have a marriage; we have a business arrangement,' " she said.

Before he donned his orange jumpsuit to work in the library of the holding pen at Butner, North Carolina, Duke tried to hide a small stash of money. The night before he was sentenced, he drove to Nancy's grandmother's house and dropped a duffel bag in the garage stuffed with cash and dirty underwear.

"She called me immediately," said her attorney. "I went over to inventory everything and gave it to the U.S. attorney. God only knows where that money came from. Duke had $32,000 in $20 and $100 bills stuffed in Ziploc bags jammed in a metal box." When Nancy told Duke that she had turned over his money to her lawyer, he berated her. She said she had no other choice. "But he just doesn't understand," she said. "He claims he's innocent, that he's been railroaded by the government, that he shouldn't be in prison. He says he signed the plea agreement under duress." She shook her head. "He even thinks he will be pardoned by President Bush."

The final humiliation came with the revelation that one of her husband's unindicted co-conspirators had provided him with prostitutes. "I called my doctor to be tested [for sexually transmitted diseases]," she said. And then she stopped taking calls from prisoner 21489–038.

Legally separated from her husband, Nancy now considers divorce but worries that Duke might survive his prison term and demand alimony. But this is an unlikely possibility. Having been through surgery for a thyroid condition and for prostate cancer, plus radiation therapy, Duke Cunningham suffers from depression, diabetes, osteoarthritis, and chronic pain from a torn rotator cuff. The psychiatric evaluation submitted to the U.S. District Court by Duke's attorneys confirms that he is taking several medications, including Zoloft for depression, Ativan for anxiety, and Trazadone and Ambien for insomnia.

Although Nancy feels tainted by her husband's criminality, she occasionally defends him and strikes back at his detractors, knowing that she, too, is being judged the same way. Still, the crucial question remains: Did she or didn't she know the extent of her husband's corruption? The answer may be that she shared enough of her husband's Gatsby-like dream to turn a blind eye to the means he used to obtain it. But the real tragedy for Duke Cunningham is that, by the time he arrived in Washington, the prestige and glamour that he imagined he would find there were long gone. The people who had the lifestyle he fantasized about weren't politicians; they were lobbyists. And Duke, the war-hero who felt he had earned a place in the pantheon of Kennedys and Bushes, felt cheated. The psychiatrist who evaluated Duke Cunningham explained his greed in proprietary terms: "It is possible that his extraordinary deeds in the service planted a subconscious sense of entitlement, which fed his rationalization to accept these gifts [bribes] for his sacrifice."

During our last evening together in San Diego, Nancy received a call on her cell phone. She gasped when she heard the special ring that signals a call from a correctional institution. "It's him," she said. "Should I take it?" I nodded and turned off the tape recorder. She took the call. She talked about the weather and listened patiently as her husband listed all his grievances. She later said that their conversations are tape-recorded and transcribed for the U.S. attorney still investigating the scandal, so she self-censors everything she says. On the other end of the line, I could hear the rich timbre of Duke Cunningham's baritone rumble, and, when she got off the phone, I said I understood how impressive he might have been as a communicator.

"Might have been, could have been, should have been," Nancy said after hanging up. "Sometimes I take his calls out of pity. Other times I ignore them, because I don't want to hear his voice … his lies … his broken promises. He has turned everything to ashes." ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Puzzles

WOODY ALLEN HAS been making films for so long and has drawn such substantial support internationally that he seems able to make any film he chooses. This is a rare privilege, but, as has been mentioned before in this space, in his case it is a mixed blessing.

SCOOP
(Focus)

13 TZAMETI
(Palm)

I can't imagine that anyone else would have been empowered to make a film from the screenplay of **SCOOP**—especially as a vehicle for the writer to direct and appear in. This picture's very existence is an argument against Allen's power. Film history is replete with sad occasions when gifted people could not get the backing to launch pet projects. Still, *Scoop* makes us admit bitterly that difficulties don't always appear in the right places.

Allen's new film is set in England, as was his last one, *Match Point*. But *Match Point* had two advantages over *Scoop*: the screenplay was relatively cogent, and Allen wasn't in the cast. *Match Point* seemed a refreshment for him: perhaps the change of scene had given Allen a fresh perspective on story and in judging his value as an actor. *Scoop* blows all that away. It seems an attempt to make the new elements old, to move London into Manhattan, to revive his old pattern of elongated revue sketches built around a comic who uses his Jewishness both as the source of his jokes and as a sniffy challenge to dislike him for that Jewishness.

Sometimes this formula has worked—as in *Everybody Says I Love You* and *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* and *Annie Hall*. (Let's not fuss with his attempts to be profound, such as *Interiors* and *Shadows and Fog*.) But sometimes his films have seemed the acts of an animal trainer appearing with a group of creatures (us, the audience) who obeyed his cues to laugh when he cracked wise.

And here we are again, in *Scoop*, sitting there while our trainer snaps his verbal whip. Paradoxically, Allen is helped by his physical clumsiness. He is so graceless and physically inept that it almost validates his jokes, as if to say, "You can trust me and obey my laugh-commands. You can see I'm not a professional performer, I'm just as everyday as you are." Almost all the actors in *Scoop* are English, of course, and professional, which oddly strengthens his bond with us: the skills in others make him sound even more like one of us.

Allen plays Splendini (aka Sid Waterman), an American magician appearing in London. For one of his tricks, a person's disappearance in a box, he asks a member of the audience to come onstage. At one performance, that person is a young American girl, Sondra, who is a college student aspiring to journalism. In that magic box she meets the spirit of a recently deceased London journalist who gives her a tip on a hot story.

I forgot to mention that previously we have seen a small ship bearing the newly dead into the Unknown, with Death at the helm. That journalist is aboard and is galled because he had a hot tip for a story that he now can't finish. He slips back to earth to pass the tip on to a reporter. Why he chooses this girl, and why Splendini then accompanies Sondra on her pursuit of the story, are only two of the oddities that this film asks us not to question.

I forgot something else. Before Sondra appears with Splendini, we have seen her seeking an interview with a famous film director. Though she is an amateur reporter, the director invites this girl into his hotel room, and though she is not especially bright, she presumably must have guessed the reason; and, what's more, she accepts several whiskeys after she is inside. It is out of this initial display of spectacular laxness that she arrives on Splendini's stage.

It would be superfluous to list the plot's gaps and sags. I note only that, unlike many of Allen's past pictures, good or less good, this one is so pointless as to be puzzling. It has no shred of theme or even of sheer narrative satisfaction. It just goes on for a while, then has a trick ending that makes everything that happened before seem even more vacuous. Why does *Scoop* exist? What was Allen after?

Scarlett Johansson, who plays Sondra, has shown talent and appeal—what the theater used to call "the bride look"—in *Girl With a Pearl Earring* and *Lost in Translation*. Here it would be both true and inaccurate to say that she is disappointing. The role is impossible. It is loaded with falsities that would hobble any actress, however gifted. All I could feel for Johansson was compassion.

Allen is wretched. It is no kind of pleasure to say so, especially with the memory of the good things he has done; but here he simply plunks front and center the fact that he cannot act and never could. Some of the carefully carpentered laugh lines he can deliver adequately, but the overall effect of his performance is that of a run-through, with the scriptwriter filling in for the real performer of Splendini, who could not be present. At least Allen is now too old to kiss girls on screen: that is a relief.

Once again I mourn that Allen has apparently never known anyone he trusted with the authority to edit his projects. The right person might have nixed a lot of his many films. Admittedly it was always pleasant to remember that there was at least one person in the major American film world who could imagine and venture pretty much as he chose; but oh, the time—his and ours—that he has wasted.

A thriller called **13 TZAMETI** was written and directed in France by a young filmmaker from Georgia named Géla Babluani, whose brother Georges plays the leading role. (Tzameti means thirteen in Georgian, so the title flaunts tautology.)

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It was meant to raise some philosophic questions, but for me it raises only one quite different question.

An impoverished Georgian immigrant is scrounging along in rural France when, through certain twists, he gets on the track of a means toward easy money. He follows the track and becomes a participant—No. 13—in a secret game of Russian roulette. A group of contestants stand in a circle, each one holding a pistol to the head of the man next to him. Each pistol contains one bullet. More bullets are added in each round as the game progresses and the number of contestants dwindles. A small group of wealthy spectators makes big bets on survivors.

The Russian roulette here is different from the roulette in *The Deer Hunter*, where it symbolized the nadir of belief in life. What is dramatized here, with icy intensity, is depravity (of the bettors) and neurotic desperation (of the players). We are meant to think about a society that revels in this moral pit. But all that puzzled me was why an audience would need a film to immerse it in wanton, speciously motivated death when the television news provides so much of it every day. ■

James Wood

Love, Actually

THE POSSIBILITY OF AN ISLAND
By Michel Houellebecq
Translated by Gavin Bowd
(Alfred A. Knopf, 337 pp., $24.95)

I.

TEN YEARS AGO, FEW READERS had heard of a young French writer named Michel Houellebecq. He was the author of some poems and a pungently callow first novel, *Extension du domaine de la lutte* (1994), or *Extension of the Domain of the Struggle* (translated as *Whatever*). A decade later, Houellebecq is the most significant provocateur in contemporary literature, whose three subsequent novels have established *un monde houellebecquien*, in which no target is spared (except, perhaps, an idealized form of love), in which sex is written up in the most basely lucid manner, women insulted (though merely more explicitly than men), religion mocked, existence itself powerfully degraded, in which all imaginable sacred cows are quickly slaughtered in the novelistic abattoir—or, rather, awarded the fate that Houellebecq wittily refers to in his new novel: analogizing the pointless savagery of French existence, he reminds us that during the British mad-cow crisis, French beef producers stamped their products "Born and raised in France. Slaughtered in France."

In Hitler's Germany, Nazis were supposed to be always "working toward the Führer." You could say that in Houellebecq's regime—and it is indeed represented as a prison—his lonely, isolated men are always working toward sex. Typically, these dank creatures are between thirty and fifty, and of modest means. The narrator of *Whatever* is a middle manager in the computer software industry. Bruno, in *Les Particules élémentaires* (1999, translated as *The Elementary Particles*), has worked as a *lycée* teacher, and now writes scabrous articles for little magazines. His half-brother, Michel, is a biologist who has decided to quit his job. The protagonist of *Platform* (2001), also called Michel—Houellebecq likes giving his characters his own name—is a minor civil servant who oversees the arts. Daniel, in Houellebecq's new novel, is unlike his fictional co-evals in his financial prosperity: he is a very successful comedian and film-maker, who has decided to take some time off in his new house in Andalusia. But all these men are sexual paupers—or at least the novels begin with their poverty. They may have had more or less successful relations with women, but always years ago. Now, as they age, they face the logic of the sexual marketplace—"youth, beauty, strength: the criteria for physical love are exactly the same as those of Nazism." They have been priced out of the market; and without sex, they have little faith in the power of love. So they masturbate constantly, consume porn, go on Club Med–style vacations to find willing women, and think resentfully of their childhoods, or of the girls and women who had it in their power to rescue them from their lonely torpor but rejected them instead. Bruno can never forget the moment when, as a teenager, he put his hand on Caroline Yessayan's leg in a cinema, was briefly allowed to keep his hand there, and was then brushed off: "Years later, when some bitch or other was sucking him off, Bruno would remember those few seconds of terrifying joy; he would also remember the moment when Caroline Yessayan moved his hand away."

Even for those familiar with the calm disillusionment of Sartre's and Camus's fiction, or even with the raging of Céline, all of whom are obvious ancestors, Houellebecq's appalling honesty is at first quite breathtaking. He has the "exaggerated honesty" that Nietzsche commends, and indeed he has the nihilist's power to stain the fabric of life so utterly that most other contemporary writers seem by comparison sentimental and untruthful. His novels are at once very French and very un-French. Brutal lucidity, especially in erotic matters, is common to Diderot, Stendhal, and Flaubert, and Houellebecq happily borrows Flaubert's habit, in *Madame Bovary*, of italicizing idiotic social phrases: "Not only are dogs in themselves a subject of permanent wonderment, but they constitute for humans an excellent *subject of conversation*," says the mocking narrator of his new novel. Yet these novels are also stripped of most of the signifiers, trivial and non-trivial, of traditional "Frenchness." His characters eat bad frozen food, live in dismal digs, dislike Paris, and refer more often to John Grisham or the filmmaker Larry Clark than to Pascal or Sartre. Regular reading material is likely to be a mail-order catalogue. Houellebecq has clearly studied his Schopenhauer, and his fiction abounds with declamations about the suffering and cruelty and pointlessness of life: "Children suffer the world that adults create for them and try their best to fit in with it; in time, they will replicate it."

But Schopenhauer, that most literary of philosophers, has influenced scores of appropriately gloomy—or funny-gloomy—novelists, from Hardy and Lawrence to Mann and Svevo and Hrabal, and Houellebecq's comic philosophical rancor about existence is far less striking than the terrific savagery with which he writes about sex. Denis Demonpion, in his journalistic biography *Houellebecq*

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non autorisé: enquête sur un phénomène (*Houellebecq Unauthorized: Inquiry Into a Phenomenon*), reports, rather dismayingly, that Houellebecq is a great admirer of Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*. Demonpion writes that in the course of a dialogue with Ellis, arranged by *Der Spiegel*, Houellebecq asserted that he found most frightening in Ellis's book the fact that the protagonist feels nothing during the sexual act: "That's where there is a connection with my own books."

THIS "CONNECTION" OF HOUellebecq's produces a horribly compelling portrait of that dirty little percentage of male sexuality that is generally hidden; the abandon with which he writes about male desire and frustration is in turn crucial to the larger panorama of squalor that he describes. Here are a few examples from the novels:

> I felt no desire for Catherine Lechardoy; I hadn't the slightest wish to *shaft* her. She was looking at me and smiling, drinking Crémant, trying her hardest to be brave; nevertheless I knew she really needed to be *shafted*. That hole at the base of her belly must appear so useless to her; a prick can always be cut off, but how do you forget the emptiness of a vagina?

> I said "Excuse me a moment," and crossed the discotheque in the direction of the toilets. Once inside I put two fingers down my throat, but the amount of vomit proved feeble and disappointing. Then I masturbated with altogether greater success: I began thinking of Véronique a bit, of course, but then I concentrated on vaginas in general and that did the trick.

> On an intellectual level, I was suddenly capable of acknowledging the attractions of the Muslim vagina.

> I liked her soft voice; her mouth was obviously pretty hot, just ready to swallow the spunk of a true friend.

> When she stood up to go and order, I caught sight of her thong, also pink, showing above her jeans, and I began to get hard.... Nuzzling her head in the hollow of my shoulder, she gently pressed my cock between her fingers.

Saul Bellow once had a character admire the "touch-cock" fingers of his mistress—how demure that seems! Houellebecq's novels are filled with pages and pages of essentially pornographic descriptions of sex. His characters masturbate, are masturbated by unnaturally forgiving women, are endlessly fellated by same; his men penetrate women, occasionally sodomize them, and also like to go off to sex colonies or swingers' nightclubs where they can engage in threesomes and foursomes. In *Platform*, Michel and his girlfriend Valérie are having sex at a resort in Cuba when the maid sees them at it. Of course, she joins them: "She was wearing nothing underneath but a pair of white cotton panties. She must have been about twenty, and her body was very brown, almost black. She had a firm little bust and finely curved buttocks.... Valérie took her hand and placed it on my penis."

But it would be unfair not to mention that Houellebecq is often very funny about these same hapless and repellent males, and that his prose can rise to aphoristic power: "Anything can happen in life, especially nothing." Or this, from the new novel: "The sexual life of man can be broken down into two phases: the first when he prematurely ejaculates, and the second when he can no longer manage to get a hard-on." If men are, as Houellebecq has it, "diminished adolescents," then it is hard not to laugh—in complicit adolescent sympathy?—when Michel, in *Platform*, is reading Grisham's *The Firm* in bed, and starts masturbating to the only sex scene in the thriller: "I was jerking off in earnest now, trying to visualize mixed-race girls wearing tiny swimsuits in the dark. I ejaculated between two pages with a groan of satisfaction. They were going to stick together; it didn't matter, it wasn't the kind of book you read twice." His new novel is funny, in part because Daniel, its protagonist, is an outrageous professional comedian, who likes to splatter his venom all over delicate topics like the Middle East: one of his best-known films is a parody of a porn film, and is called *Munch on My Gaza Strip* (*My Huge Jewish Settler*). And the comedy is not only sexual. In the new novel there is a wildly good outburst, conducted for two extravagant pages in the manner of Thomas Bernhard, about the Catholic writer Teilhard de Chardin, whom Daniel loathes:

> If there is one thing that has always plunged me into sadness or compassion, I mean into a state that excludes all manner of nastiness or irony, it is the existence of Teilhard de Chardin—not only his existence, but the very fact that he has, or could have had, readers, however small the number. In the presence of a reader of Teilhard de Chardin I feel disarmed, nonplussed, ready to break down in tears.

II.

HOUELLEBECQ HAS ALWAYS admired Dostoevsky, and one can indeed see his useless males as postmodern iterations of the Russian tradition of the "superfluous man." In Turgenev's *The Diary of a Superfluous Man*, the narrator, who is dying, confesses to his inept relations with women, and to the impotent fury he feels toward those men who are amorously successful; and Dostoevsky's underground man has similar resentments. In *The Elementary Particles* and in his new novel, Houellebecq literalizes this figurative notion of superfluity: he speculates about a time, millennia hence, when men will be so superfluous as no longer to exist. Michel, the biologist in *The Elementary Particles*, is working on cloning, and seems mystically to long for a post-human age. In *The Possibility of an Island*, that post-human age has arrived. The new novel is narrated in alternating chapters. One strand tells the story of Daniel, a French comedian known for his anti-Semitic and Islamophobic routines. This man, though rich and successful, is an emotional failure, and pays for sex with prostitutes. He meets Isabelle, but the relationship founders. Then he meets Esther, a young porn star, and experiences sexual and amorous bliss: at last, he has known what true love is. But this, too, must come to an end.

Alternating with this quintessentially Houellebecquian story is a science fiction plot. (Demonpion reports that as a young man Houellebecq devoured science fiction.) Every other chapter is narrated by Daniel's clone, two thousand years hence. This clone is known as Daniel 24, because he is the twenty-fourth version of the original Daniel. Halfway through the book, Daniel 24 dies and gives way to Daniel 25. These clones live in a post-human age and refer to themselves as neo-humans. Quite a lot of this is silly in that effortless way of being silly almost unique to science fiction. But one of

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Houellebecq's decisions is powerful: his clones are reading the life story of the original Daniel, and attempting to divine his motives. In the neo-human age, laughter, tears, sexual desire, and love have disappeared. The only evidence that they existed resides in the texts the humans left behind. So Daniel 24 and Daniel 25 study the human Daniel's story in the way that we might study Plato or Homer. How could these humans have squandered so much over these strange, archaic emotions? Why would men have ruined themselves in their quests for that unimaginable quarry, love? The superfluous man has become the lost man.

This dual story, obviously enough, allows Houellebecq to frame his customarily sardonic, pornographic, and dispiriting human narrative in a moral context; it is the moment at which the novelist can move away from his characters, and tearfully judge them. Daniel may be a bastard, Houellebecq seems to say, like all the bastards in my other novels, but at least the bastards are fighting, however gracelessly, to exercise the fundamental human capacities—chief of which is not sex, in fact, but love. "I continued all the same, in my heart of hearts, and in the face of all the evidence, to believe in love," says Daniel.

FOR DESPITE APPARENT EVIDENCE to the contrary, Houellebecq is not a nihilist but a moralist—and a moralist who consistently idealizes heterosexual love. This is why, though it is often hard to like his fiction, it is possible to admire the strange tortured creature who writes it. Houellebecq was born Michel Thomas, on the French island of Réunion, in 1956, where his accomplished mother, a reader of Mann and Dostoevsky, worked as a doctor. His father, René Thomas, had left school at thirteen, but was a keen reader. (He liked Céline.) He worked as a grocer, a gardener, and finally as a mountain guide. The only full account presently available of Michel's peculiar childhood is Demonpion's lumpy biography. In it, both Houellebecq's father and mother talk with remarkable frankness about how willingly they abandoned their small son. "I have above all lived my life rather than his, but I knew he was in good hands," the father tells Demonpion. When Michel was five months old, his mother's contract was terminated, and the parents decided to cross Africa in a Citroën 2CV. Michel was sent to live with his grandparents in Algeria, where he stayed until 1961. By this time, his parents had divorced. Subsequently, Michel grew up in France with his paternal grandmother, whose name he later took as an act of solidarity with the woman who raised him.

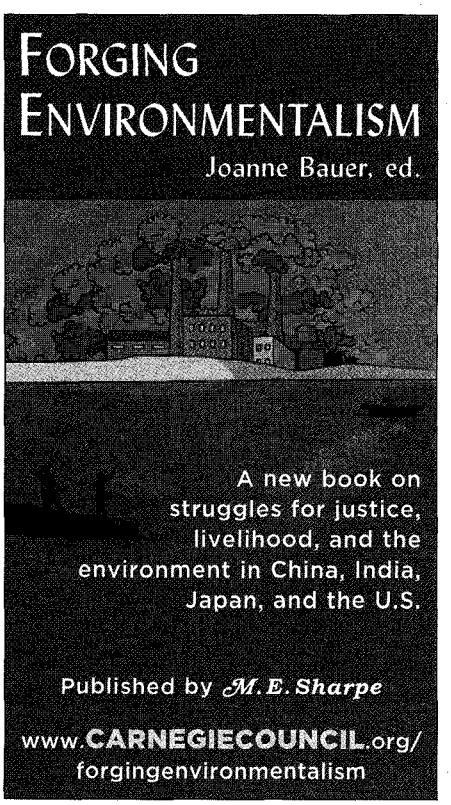
Houellebecq is suffused with a great sense of righteous vengeance, personal and cultural. For him, his parents' selfishness is emblematic of the sexual revolution that would sweep through the 1960s. "In a sense, it was one of the precursors of the vast movement of familial dissolution which was going to follow," he says in Demonpion's book. "I developed the clear consciousness that a grave injustice had been committed in my regard. I developed out of this a concern for my father and a great disgust for my mother."

In his fiction, Houellebecq prosecutes this "vast movement of familial dissolution" with a Nietzschean hammer. His "diminished adolescents" are all orphans of the 1960s. *Platform* begins, like Camus's *The Stranger*, with the narrator saying a bitter farewell to a parent. Michel, the narrator, looks at his father's corpse and thinks: "He had made the most of his life, the old bastard; he was a clever cunt." Houellebecq awards the half-brothers Bruno and Michel, in *The Elementary Particles*, an exaggerated version of his own family history. We infer that neither man can achieve successful relations with women because of how their mother, a sexually wayward beatnik, abandoned them. The burden of caring for a child "was incompatible with [her] personal freedom."

Houellebecq's male characters are exiled from what the author sees as a sexual market that is merely an extension of capitalism—an extension of the domain of the struggle. Each of his novels devotes passages of exegesis to this idea. As Houellebecq sees it, the liberal individualism of the 1960s turned Western man into a sexual commodity, a market that benefited some and excluded more. As the narrator of his first novel explains:

> It's a fact, I mused to myself, that in societies like ours, sex truly represents a second system of differentiation, completely independent of money; and as a system of differentiation it functions just as mercilessly.... Just like unrestrained economic liberalism, and for similar reasons, sexual liberalism produces phenomena of *absolute pauperization*. Some men make love every day; others five or six times in their life, or never.... It's what's known as "the law of the market." In an economic system where unfair dismissal is prohibited, every person more or less manages to find their place. In a sexual system where adultery is prohibited, every person more or less manages to find their bed mate. In a totally liberal economic system, certain people accumulate considerable fortunes; others stagnate in unemployment and misery. In a totally liberal sexual system certain people have a varied and exciting erotic life; others are reduced to masturbation and solitude.

In *Platform*, this connection between the two markets, sexual and economic, is made even more explicit. Michel's girlfriend, Valérie, works for the director of a major French tour operator. Together with Michel, they conceive, and put into action, a commercial plan to establish a number of resorts in Third World countries. Through subtle marketing, these resorts will attract sexual tourists by winking at the availability of cheap local prostitutes. *The Elementary Particles* locates the date of the downfall: the late 1950s and early 1960s were a "golden age of romantic love," argues Houellebecq, "but at precisely this time Europe was flooded with prurient mass-market enter-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tainment from America (the songs of Elvis Presley, the films of Marilyn Monroe) ... the sexual, self-indulgent American option received great support from the liberal press." These newspapers and magazines were notionally left-wing, but in fact embraced "the ideals of the entertainment industry: individual freedom, the supremacy of youth over age and the destruction of Judeo-Christian values." The sexual revolution would "destroy the last unit separating the individual from the market. The destruction continues to this day."

One can see why Houellebecq has excited such ecstatic reviews. It is exciting to encounter a vision of such furious logic, unafraid to do its angry computation on the page, bold with social and moral outrage. And Houellebecq's vengeful conservatism, though familiar in many ways—the 1960s is once again the culprit, with Charles Manson the inevitable fruit of all the enjoyable excesses—can indeed fire into brilliance. The best chapter in his best novel, *The Elementary Particles*, mobilizes this conservatism to argue, with unexpected power and rectitude, that Huxley's *Brave New World*, far from being a dystopia, is actually "our idea of heaven: genetic manipulation, sexual liberation, the war against aging, the leisure society." And note the canny way in which Houellebecq's critique is at once left-wing and right-wing. Right-wing, in that unrestrained sexuality is pinned on the degradations of the 1960s and on American self-indulgence; left-wing, in that unrestrained sexuality is likened, in Marxist fashion, to the ravages of the capitalist market.

This must explain some of Houellebecq's success with young readers in a post-ideological age. There is something here for everyone, and especially for the laddish reader of *Maxim* and *GQ*. *The Possibility of an Island* adumbrates Houellebecq's vision of the misery of sexual liberalism. Middle-aged Daniel first finds happiness with Isabelle, a woman his own age. But as her middle-aged body begins to sag and crease, she decides that she must leave him. The law of the market dictates that Daniel will no longer find her sexy, and will look among younger women, or whores, for satisfaction. Being wise, she fatalistically breaks off the relationship. Daniel does indeed find another woman, Esther, a porn star in her twenties. Psychologically speaking, Isabelle's action is completely incredible, but Houellebecq is not much interested in this kind of realism. Rather, Isabelle's willing sexual self-exile proves what Daniel—and, it seems, his author—believes, that sexual pleasure is the province of the young: "young people, leading a lazy, carefree life, partially occupied by scarcely absorbing studies, were able to devote themselves unlimitedly to the liberated exultation of their bodies." But once they marry and have children, they will be witnesses to "the irreversible degradation of their own bodies." Thus Houellebecq's vision both chastises and flatters the young. In time, they will be the victims of a pitiless sexual system—but, true children of Augustine, not yet!

Alas, Houellebecq's critique has more holes in it than a sabotaged condom. Like all nostalgias, it is happily vague about the details of its golden age. An economic system in which everyone "more or less" managed to find "their place" was also a system in which, to borrow Houellebecq's language, people stagnated in misery, precisely because their place was so miserable. Correspondingly, a sexual system in which adultery was prohibited and in which everyone managed to find "their bed mate" was also a system in which many married people stagnated in misery, precisely because their bed mate turned out to be a bad mate: nineteenth-century fiction abundantly tells us this. Do more people stagnate in solitary misery in today's system than stagnated in conjugal misery in yesterday's system? Interestingly, for a writer so obsessed with sexual questions, what is elided in the coy term "bed mate" is the question of sex itself. Without of course admitting it, Houellebecq surely comes close, here, to arguing that sex itself is the problem. Things would be better, he seems to be about to say, if we could only will ourselves back to a closed system in which sex did not bulk so large, in which finding a true "mate" was what mattered, a "bed mate" who was a mate for life. So underneath Houellebecq's obvious conservatism is an even deeper conservatism, I think, in which the novelist is always on the verge of saying the unsayable, of speaking the kind of Catholic truism that, say, Chesterton would have endorsed but which must repel the atheist Frenchman who so dislikes Teilhard de Chardin: that the consolations of sex are as nothing to the ecstasies of love.

This explains the sentimentality that always hovers over his treatment of love. For Houellebecq's novels share the same helplessly latent shape, and that shape is tellingly emotive, not to say sentimental. The novels all establish, as their premise, a lonely, love-starved, sex-deprived man, who has been cast out from life's feast, and who returns the insult with resentments to spare. Readerly sympathy for this man is rigorously negated by the author, who labors to make him disagreeable. Daniel, in *The Possibility of an Island*, tells us that he cannot remember why he married his first wife. On the day of his son's suicide, he had calmly made a tomato omelet: "I had never loved that child: he was as stupid as his mother, and as nasty as his father. His death was far from a catastrophe; you can live without such human beings."

But in the course of Houellebecq's last three novels, with uniform patterning, this Timon-like character is gradually softened and humanized, so that the reader can begin to feel something approaching ordinary compassion: the misanthrope will meet a woman who understands him. The narrator of *Platform* encounters Valérie in a Thai resort. In *The Elementary Particles*, Bruno meets Christiane at a New Age sex colony. Meanwhile, his half-brother, Michel, who lacks any libido, hooks up with an old flame, Annabelle, and together they coax a few sparks out of the old embers. (They even try to have children.) And in the new novel, Daniel meets Esther, his porn star. Each man realizes that this is the first time he has ever found love, and understands, fatalistically, that it will be the last. Daniel thinks of his blissful time with Esther as a second age, "in which you already know, at the moment when you begin to experience true happiness, that you are, at the end of the day, going to lose it."

And lose it they do. Whatever his talents as an exaggerator—and they are not inconsiderable ones—Houellebecq is a fairly primitive novelist. In repeated acts of crudely blatant manipulation, he deprives his male characters of their gorgeous women at the very peak of their happiness. Valérie is gunned down by Islamic terrorists as she and Michel sit together at the bar of a Thai resort. He survives, she dies. Rather grossly, Christiane and Annabelle are killed off at the end of *The Elementary Particles*; for different reasons, they both commit suicide.

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This information is delivered by Houellebecq with such town-crier-like brutality and speediness that the reader almost laughs at the plot's ideological obviousness. And in the new novel, Esther leaves Spain, and the relationship, for New York. Daniel, who had not before believed in love, is at least glad that he has now known it: "I could only, like so many who had finally been defeated despite their sniggers and their grimaces, bow down: immense and admirable, undoubtedly, was the power of love."

Since love and sex seem to be causally connected for Houellebecq, most of these women, with the exception of Annabelle, are sexual A-graders, with what amounts to a biologist's expertise in how to handle the male member. An advanced degree in fellatio is an absolute prerequisite. Christiane helpfully explains to Bruno that as a professor of natural science, she understands how the genitals work: "The shaft of the clitoris and the glans of the penis are covered in Krause's corpuscles, rich in nerve endings. When touched, they cause a powerful flow of endorphins in the brain...." More important than their sexual efficiency is that that these women are kind, and delight in giving sexual pleasure. Michel tells Valérie that most Western women have lost that art: "You enjoy giving pleasure. Offering your body as an object of pleasure, giving pleasure unselfishly." And perhaps love can break away from sex? Significantly, the most affecting relationship in Houellebecq's fiction is that of the unsexual Michel and Annabelle, for whom sex is not as important as tenderness.

Just as a hidden conservatism runs beneath his obvious conservatism, so underneath the apparent radicalism of Houellebecq's jazzy forms—his riffs and diatribes, his savage essays and intellectual excursions, the novelties that have excited his thousands of readers—lies a nice, solid, cozy old box spring: nasty man lacks love and sex; nasty man finds love and sex; nasty man, now a bit less nasty in our eyes, loses love and sex—above all, love. Tears and handkerchiefs follow. It is the essential template of popular fiction, which merely provides a happy ending where Houellebecq deprives us of one.

Houellebecq, as I say, is a moralist: he wants to rub our faces in the vileness he so avidly represents. But why does he so avidly represent it? Because he wants to rub our faces in it. Does this explain away the contradiction? It does not, exactly. But the contradiction may be unavoidable, and in turn explains the self-immolating rage that makes his fiction so interesting. On the one hand, the liberal sexual system is savagely vilified; on the other hand, the solution to the misery engendered by that system can only come out of that system. These men find their female saviors, their modern Dulcineas, within the system they despise—in nightclubs and nudist colonies and tourist resorts—and in turn their Dulcineas have a sexual prowess burnished by time served inside it. And in a further paradox, this one nearly unspeakable, the solution that these women offer to male sexual misery and isolation may not have that much to do with sex at all, but instead with what Philip Larkin, who knew about these things, called "that much-mentioned brilliance, love." So these women not only offer to defeat, in their loving-kindness, the hated system; they threaten to defeat also the validity of Houellebecq's critique of the system. For if sex is not finally as important as love, then sexual pauperization is not the most important misery. These women embarrass Houellebecq's vision as maniacally over-sexualized. And if these wonderful women, these wish-fulfillments in thongs, exist somewhere in the world, then the system is not the cruel sexual machine it is alleged to be. No wonder that Houellebecq must kill these kind women off with absurd rapidity, lest they turn his cold, savage, moralistic novels into warm, soppy, moralistic ones.

Whatever one thinks about this body of work, it is scandalously alive. And his new novel suggests a deepening moral vision. Still, there is a difference between fruitful ambiguity and helpless confusion. Houellebecq's fiction seems at present incoherent, seesawing between a savage critique and a barely expressible solution, and likewise seesawing between the author's distaste for modern sexual excess and the pornographic zeal with which he documents it. Houellebecq may not be the racist misogynist of popular allegation, but his fiction partakes a little too easily of the vileness it supposedly dislikes. There is an obvious quality of moral resistance on the part of the author, expressed in his furious exegeses, but the fiction itself—the dramatic representation—offers no mimetic resistance. It is the *fiction* that is itself comparatively weak, and comparatively uninteresting. Which magazine ran an extract from Houellebecq's new novel? *Playboy*, of course. ■

Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn

The Mind of the Moralist

MY LIFE AMONG THE DEATHWORKS: ILLUSTRATIONS ON THE AESTHETICS OF AUTHORITY
By Philip Rieff
Edited by Kenneth S. Piver
(University of Virginia Press, 234 pp., $34.95)

I.

DAMIEN HIRST, THE BRITish artist best known for suspending dead animals in formaldehyde, recently announced plans to produce a new masterpiece: a human skull cast in platinum, studded with diamonds. The piece, titled "For the Love of God," will include 8,500 jewels, is valued at $15 million to $19 million, and has a projected retail cost of at least five times that.

What is wrong with productions like Hirst's ornamented skull, and with so many other objects and images that pass for today's masterworks of both high and popular culture? What is it about them that makes them seem obscene? This is the subject of Philip Rieff's new book. *My Life Among the Deathworks* is not Rieff's first tour de force, but it is the last to be published in his lifetime. On July 1, this remarkable intellectual, one of the most formidable foes of nihilism in our time, died at his home in Philadelphia, at the age of eighty-three. His life among the deathworks is over, but the deathworks live on; and so this is a fitting time not only for an analysis of

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his most recent book of cultural criticism, but also for a retrospective look at his achievement as a whole.

PHILIP RIEFF WAS BORN IN 1922 on the North Side of Chicago. The son of a butcher, he set his sights on being a sportswriter for the *Chicago Daily News*. At the University of Chicago he came into contact with Edward Shils, and after serving as assistant to a brigadier general in World War II, he joined the faculty there, where he met and married the young Susan Sontag. They had a son, David, a writer whose work appears in these pages. The marriage eventually dissolved, and in 1963 he married Alison Knox, with whom he lived until his death. Rieff taught at several universities, including Brandeis and Berkeley, but he spent the bulk of his teaching career, from 1961 to 1992, at the University of Pennsylvania.

His field was sociology, but he was like no other sociologist, and he mastered many fields. He blazed onto the intellectual scene in 1959 with *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist*, followed in 1963 by his ten-volume edition of *The Collected Papers of Sigmund Freud*, which established him as one of the keenest and most original of Freud's interpreters. Rieff's brilliant book bore down on the tensions between ethics and psychoanalysis—the persistence of a moral outlook in Freud's thought at the same time that Freudian theory represented a new sensibility in revolt against nineteenth-century moralism, especially in the realm of sexuality. In Rieff's account, psychoanalysis sought to apply "aseptic rationalism" to love and sex, shining the light of science into the darkest corners of the psyche. Its method of therapy required the breakdown of the traditional social space between analyst and patient—the sharing of personal, even unconscious life, over which the patient had no control and therefore no responsibility. "By waiving the restrictions of conventional logic and prudery, the therapeutic hour provides the patient with a model refreshment," Rieff wrote. "It puts an end to decorum, providing a private time in which anything may be said—indeed, in which the patient is encouraged to say everything." Rieff did not look kindly upon these releases from traditional restraints.

An intellectual biography of uncommon suppleness, and a genuine literary achievement, *Freud* concluded by heralding the arrival of a new human type that Rieff memorably called "psychological man." Forever anxious and insecure, psychological man eschews political and religious commitments, and even economic calculation, for an obsession with self that is unprecedented in human history. He is "anti-heroic, shrewd, carefully counting his satisfactions and dissatisfactions, studying unprofitable commitments as the sins most to be avoided." Driven by the "ideal of insight" and "self-contemplative manipulation," his interest resides only in himself.

IN 1966, RIEFF PROBED MORE deeply into the implications of psychological man in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud*, his most influential and eye-opening work. A study of Freudianism in its larger cultural and intellectual contexts, it established him as one of the great critics of modern life. Rieff emphasized the post-Freudians' misuse of psychoanalytic insights for grandiose plans for social or personal regeneration, which he opposed to Freud's stoic wisdom, his sense of the limited and therefore tragic ramifications of his theory. Where *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist* was steadfastly focused on the man and his ideas, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* was a study of the Freudian aftermath, of Freudianism as a kind of civil religion—of how the breakdown of reticence, convention, and social distance had promoted the treatment hour into an emblem of society at large, as everyone learned to live like analysands and analysts.

If it is now widely understood that the terms by which Americans live their lives have everything to do with this therapeutic sensibility, much of the credit goes to Rieff's pioneering work. His investigations helped to inaugurate a new tradition of social criticism, exemplified in their different ways by Tom Wolfe and Christopher Lasch, Thomas Szasz and Andrew J. Polsky, Christina Hoff Sommers and Sally Satel, and others. Rieff's work was one of the first sustained efforts to make sense of the transition from a culture based on faith to a culture based on therapy.

A basic fact of the human condition, Rieff wrote in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, is that we are separate beings, with each of us "different from every other in his identity, his incommunicability, his inwardness," along with his very "real needs." Culture serves a crucial function in managing and to some extent relieving this terrible isolation: by conveying a sense of transcendent ideals or beliefs—a sense of the sacred—it delivers us from the loneliness and the anxiety to which the solitary psyche is prone. Culture consists of a "great chain of meaning" that allows us to direct our desires toward shared ends by setting up "permissions and restraints," which are internalized as moral conscience. Socialization is the process by which individuals form moral selves, learning to control their urges and steer them toward "fixed wants" that can be properly satisfied, and toward the legitimate outlet of cultural activity. Freudian theory articulated the vital role of sublimation, but it disregarded religious belief, thus depriving sublimation of any deeper meaning than personal adjustment. For Rieff, culture provides both meaning—a focus for aspiration—and consolation for the sacrifice and the suffering that are an inevitable part of ordinary experience.

The replacement of a religious basis for culture by a solely therapeutic ideal, the usurpation of the sense of transcendent purpose by the quest for self-fulfillment and emotional catharsis, was the historical development upon which Rieff unflinchingly fixed his gaze. He faulted Freud's successors for trying to install new "therapies of commitment" where religion once stood. This, he insisted, Freud himself never sought to do. Freud remained a skeptical rationalist, but some of his followers abandoned both skepticism and reason. Jung's cult of the creative individual rummaging through unconscious archetypes, Lawrence's worship of instinct and sex, and Reich's desire for an erotic utopia were all attempts to revive the therapeutic function of religion: the new religiosity of an age of unbounded self-analysis and self-love.

The Triumph of the Therapeutic made an indelible mark—indeed, it permanently affected the way modernity has come to be viewed. Many readers awaited Rieff's next contribution with anticipation. What followed, in 1973, was *Fellow Teachers*, an impassioned and obscure book about the teaching profession that took the form of a letter addressed to the

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editors of *Salmagundi*. It was not welcomed with the same enthusiasm as the earlier books, though it deserves reconsideration, since it presciently captured those trends in academia that came to be known as "political correctness," a development not fully apparent until decades later.

In subsequent years, Rieff published much less. A collection of his essays, *The Feeling Intellect*, edited by Jonathan B. Imber, helped to keep his ideas in modest circulation. But without *My Life Among the Deathworks*, there would have been only a handful of articles and book chapters over a span of more than three decades. Fortunately, this new volume will soon be joined by four other posthumous books: the other two volumes in the trilogy, *Sacred Order/Social Order*, edited by Kenneth S. Piver, which is begun by *My Life Among the Deathworks*; a study of charisma, long in the making; and a new edition of *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*.

II.

For Rieff, a deathwork is "an all-out assault upon something vital to the established culture." Much of today's cultural expression, in his view, consists of deathworks aimed at destroying not just an older traditional culture, but also the foundation of culture itself. Rieff's complaints are very large. He believes that in America transgression has now replaced creation as a cultural ideal; that creativity in our time has more to do with the urge to destroy. *My Life Among the Deathworks* is an angry book. It is also a major work of social criticism that offers a profound assessment of the historical developments that have brought us to this anguished moment. With the intellectual courage that made his earlier work so vital to readers in a wide range of fields and walks of life, Rieff urges us to train our sights on the void itself.

Consider some of the images that illustrate Rieff's complaint. Robert Mapplethorpe's *Self-Portrait*, from 1978, signifies for Rieff the extent to which art gave way over the course of the twentieth century to transgression for transgression's sake. The photograph, in which the photographer poses with a whip inserted into his anus, seems designed to arouse not only a dark kind of lust, but also a sense of spiritual desolation—a feeling of having fallen so low that there is no way out. The photograph seems to recommend this pain. And this is only an extreme example of the lurid fixations in the popular culture that have metastasized to astronomical proportions. There is also, to choose from many instances of nihilism in popular culture, the video game Grand Theft Auto, in which players beat prostitutes to death after having sex with them; Eminem's rapping about raping and murdering his mother; the graphic violence of Madonna's wildly popular video "What It Feels Like for a Girl"; the website *gorezone.com*, which shows scenes of accidents, torture, and mutilation; the television commercial for Starburst candy that depicts a man reaching into a boiling vat of what looks to be acid, only to have his arms dissolved. Rieff does not argue for censorship. He argues for concern. And he asks what it means for an entire culture to be beset by such motifs. He looks beyond excessively violent or sexual imagery to the question of the culture as a whole, offering a theory and a method of viewing cultural artifacts as well as the unconscious expressions we use in everyday life.

My Life Among the Deathworks is a hauntingly beautiful blend of poetry, ethical inquiry, and lament. Upon opening it, however, readers familiar with the early work, or even those for whom this work is their introduction to Rieff, may well want to close it. It is a difficult, even turgid book, and its endless allusions and impacted erudition sometimes threaten to stifle sense. It is peculiar to write an urgent polemic in an arcane style. Rieff ought to have forsworn the jargon and the esotericism to which so many contemporary academics are prone; but *My Life Among the Deathworks* veers perilously close to the style of the postmodernist professor who seems to aim at obscurantism rather than illumination. Rieff even presents a vocabulary of his own: "*pop*" stands for "primacy of possibility," a cult of the primordial; and "*via*" for "vertical in authority," a kind of moral stairway leading to the heavens, our position on which determines our identity; and so on. What can be done with a sentence such as this: "Every *via* in all second worlds is there to organize the lifespace of agents moving freely in that space, or fatefully in competing first world *vias*."

Rieff says that his method is one of collage: he aims "to take the reader behind and beyond contemporary reality by juxtaposing events and works that do not appear, on first reading, to be related." He adduces many "image entries," which are "sorties into an otherwise invisible sacred order," in order to examine, as if under a microscope, works of art and other cultural expressions from many different time periods, here described as a "whirling contemporaneity." Is this not exactly what the postmodernists and the cultural studies crowd have been doing—plucking cultural emanations out of context and reducing them to an intellectually fancy mishmash?

But I hope that readers will persevere. For through layer upon layer of analysis, Rieff ushers the reader into a world in which ideas and issues long ago deemed important suddenly matter again. While *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* remained ambiguous about Rieff's own judgment of the momentous shift that he described—he said he used sociological jargon to retain neutrality, even if his poetic allusion to the lost sense of the sacred betrayed his real leanings—*My Life Among the Deathworks* makes the disavowal of neutrality an intrinsic part of the analysis. And the rewards of the analysis are many.

At the crux of the book is the notion of culture as "world-creation": "the arrangement or order of words, images, bodies, of all social relations," which amount to "the making of the world each new day." Rather than a benign lifestyle choice, Rieff sees culture as highly serious, "the continuation of war by other—normative—means." We struggle internally with our baser impulses, which threaten to lower us on the vertical in authority. The result of this struggle establishes where we end up morally, what will be our inner makeup, since for Rieff we are "constituted by where we are in sacred order." Likewise, this struggle carries over onto public terrain, "where the fighting continues."

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Rieff offers a typology of human experience as divided into first, second, and third worlds. These designations correspond roughly with historical epochs: first, ancient civilization, which was devoted to "mythic 'primacies of possibility' from which derived all agencies of authority, including its god-terms"; second, the era of Judeo-Christian culture in the West; and third, our own times. The third world's "recycling" of the first-world's aesthetic troubles Rieff deeply, for it renders primordial various facets of identity, such as race, ethnicity, or sexuality, while emptying identity of any meaningful content and transforming it into mere role-playing. The sense of the self and its needs as primordial obscures any boundaries between the self and the real world. A pretense of creativity hides a practice of destruction, as others are no longer respected as persons in their own right, as beings independent of the self and its own picture of itself and its wants.

Rieff makes no secret of his affinity for the second world. Lacking the "meta-divine and impersonal" aspects of the first and third worlds, the second is rooted in a humbling faith in ultimate authority, the specificity of which rules out primordial fantasies and abstractions of the self. With nature deemed created and not a divine force itself, the possibility for taming it exists. And the concrete sense of the divine in the Judeo-Christian tradition lends itself to a view of the human person as inviolable. "The superb thing in creation is the human," Rieff declares.

As Rieff showed in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, authority traditionally worked through moral interdiction and culture's provision of legitimate releases. Remissions were expected and accepted. But the elites of the second culture took a "radically remissive" stance, attacking their culture head-on. Replacing traditional authority with a new anti-authoritarianism that cast all interdiction as intolerable restraint on individual freedom, the third world constituted an anti-culture, replacing humility with a sense of unlimited possibility and the everyday reality of restraint and satisfaction with the gospel of self-fulfillment through personal experience, "always ending in the name of a better world elsewhere."

CONTEMPORARY CULTURE, FOR Rieff, aims at little more than the demise of the second world. Where Freud, in Rieff's earlier account of him, appeared to be on the fence between the dying and the emergent cultures, he now joins the "great negational theorists and artists," having played a role in ushering in an amoral universe in which "everything supporting ascents to a higher, more human life" is actively suppressed. That a way of life devoted to the freeing of the individual actually deprives people of the sources of freedom of self-creation, which is a moral endeavor, is the bitter irony of our age. In the absence of legitimate authority, power alone dictates, which can only lead to a cult of "creative destruction"—to deathworks.

Through his readings of artworks and artifacts, Rieff's view of what is missing from contemporary life emerges. While he sees third world motifs in early modern as well as modern and contemporary works, he argues that these motifs have now become dominant. The inventions that he analyzes range dramatically in style, medium, and historical circumstance. They include Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917), Piero Manzoni's *Artist's Shit, no. 31* (1961), and Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* (1987). But some of the objects of Rieff's wrath are more surprising. The painting *Summer* by Giuseppe Arcimboldo, from 1573, which depicts a man's face composed of seasonal fruits and vegetables, attacks the second world's sacred order by taking one of the prime symbols of humanity—the human face—and deconstructing it: the devotion to a coherent, created reality, in which the integrity of the human person was a foundation, falls prey here to the "doctrine of de-creation in which the new world is a series of more or less horrible or at least horribly clever pastiches and negations." Michelangelo's *Rondanini Pietà* merges persons unduly; his *Roma Pietà* over-eroticizes the mother-son relation. Vermeer's *Girl Interrupted at Her Music* depicts a violation of propriety. Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* is "the founding transgressive image of modern art," with what Rieff furiously denounces as its "dog-faced defecating woman." All these masterpieces are also deathworks, "against the sexual self-control of second cultures."

For Rieff, the space between beings represents the distance necessary for the inviolability of the self and the maintenance of the proper relation between self and others. Thus, Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* on the Sistine ceiling is a second-world creation, with its void between the divine and the human, "the space in which all humanity lives." The distance between lovers is what makes love possible, as it maintains the integrity of each individual necessary for any sense of relation. But the third culture tries to close "the distances between any desire and its object," to deliver instant gratification, and to merge the self into everything outside of itself. When the self becomes nothing but its desires and its impulses, liberation seems to demand the eradication of all obstacles between the "I" and the "not-I." Human beings are experienced only as objects in the self's quest for gratification, and eventually are turned into trash.

Two Poems by Federico García Lorca

from Poem of the Saeta

The Way

Virgin in crinoline,
opened up like an enormous
tulip,
Virgin of Solitude.
In your boat of light,
among turbulent Saetas
and crystal stars,
you sail
the high tide of the city.
Virgin in crinoline,
you sail
upon the river of the street
until you reach the sea!

Saeta

A black Christ
changes from a lily of Judea
to a carnation of Spain.

Look where he comes from!

From Spain.
A clear, dark sky,
a scorched earth
and riverbeds in which
the waters move slowly.
A black Christ
with long, blackened hair,
prominent cheekbones,
white eyes.

Look where he's going!

—translated by Ralph Angel

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This obliteration of both the self and others through the destruction of boundaries prepares the ground, Rieff insists, for an erotics of destruction. Without legitimate limits on desire, aggressive impulses often take over. This is why, in Rieff's view, the ultimate deathworks were the Nazi death camps. Suggesting a link that may offend some readers, Rieff writes that works such as Duchamp's *Étant donnés* (with its peephole into a shimmering landscape featuring a naked and mutilated female corpse) and the death camps bear a deep resemblance: both violate "the temple of God, the body." It is a coarse comparison, but it is based on an idea worth taking seriously, which is that art cannot be entirely severed from morality. The rendering of corpses as beautiful—or murders as artistic or masterful or efficient—is part of the third culture's "negation of life itself."

There is much fodder for controversy in these pages, not least Rieff's opinions on homosexuality and bisexuality, which in his view run against the commanding truths of the second culture. Still, Rieff is also quick to say that he does not regard his own criticism as the last word. Even the "commanding truths" are not rigid; they are constantly re-interpreted by generation after generation. He stands firmly against today's forms of religious extremism, and against any attempt to re-impose an older religious order, regarding fundamentalism as another example of the disastrous cult of primordial identities. With its consistent defense of democracy and the individual and its strict criticism of consumer capitalism, Rieff's work can hardly be subsumed under any political umbrella.

While Rieff's view of our contemporary situation is grave, his jeremiad reveals a certain degree of hope. He calls for more careful readings of cultural expressions that are attuned to the sacred. He distinguishes between a performative or critical intellect, which only dissects and destroys, by assuming that there is no truth or reality and so canvassing the cultural scene for texts and traditions to debunk, and a feeling intellect, which continues to seek out truths through a combination of all the human faculties and not rationality alone, shorn of the insights of the heart and the soul.

Rieff believes that we need fewer "scourges" and more "sacred messengers," such as Lincoln, who remind us of what is hallowed in our social order. Can a society really function without a sense of the sacred? In the absence of a shared sense of what we treasure, how can we keep our moral and cultural bearings? That Philip Rieff was a great scourge is plain. But it is not too much of an exaggeration to say that at his best he could also be a sacred messenger. ■

Deborah Friedell

Austen in Alabama

MOCKINGBIRD:
A PORTRAIT OF HARPER LEE
By Charles J. Shields
(Henry Holt, 337 pp., $25)

WHY ARE THERE WRITERS who stop writing? Writers of remarkable ability who claim depletion of talent, or desertion by the muse, or even—incredibly—that they would just like to try something else? Their refusal or inability to follow up on their successes provokes forsaken readers into demanding explanations, the more fantastic the better. Failing for decades to publish a novel after *Call It Sleep*, Henry Roth came up with a variety of excuses, including sore elbow, anti-Semitism, and laziness. Nothing satisfied until he offered an explanation so hideous it had to be true: he was essentially an autobiographical writer, and, unable to write about the sexual abuse he had inflicted on his sister, he could not write at all. The professor in Paul Auster's novel *The Book of Illusions* is the author of a "meditation on silence," a book on Rimbaud, Dashiell Hammett, Laura Riding, and J.D. Salinger, "poets and novelists of uncommon brilliance who, for one reason or another, had stopped." Their silence is simultaneously maddening and appealing. Having created hits, they would not publish worse. To some of their readers, their silence only makes them more powerful, gods refusing to show their faces, too good for the world.

In their company must surely reside Harper Lee. That she wrote only one book, nearly universally beloved, is perhaps the best-known biographical fact about her; for some of her readers, it is the only fact. Charles J. Shields has now produced the first biography of the novelist, who, unsurprisingly, refused to approve of the project, or avail herself for any interviews, or sanction Shields to quote from her writing. Yet Shields is unstinting in his admiration for Lee—the biography oozes love—and his justification for writing an unauthorized life is persuasive: "I believe it is important to record Lee's story while there are still a few people alive who were part of it and can remember."

Nearly all biographies contain invasions of privacy, and though Shields's book is hardly a shocker, no biography of Lee could avoid accusations of betrayal and paradox. Lee is intensely private, and of the many lessons promoted in the exceedingly didactic *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the final and most deeply felt is of the moral importance of leaving shy people alone. In the closing moments of the novel, Atticus Finch and the Maycomb County sheriff prepare to lie about the death of Bob Ewell so that Boo Radley, the good man who killed him, can be spared: "draggin' him with his shy ways into the limelight—to me, that's a sin."

So there is something perverse about lovers of the novel flocking to read an unauthorized biography of its reclusive author. But unlike Boo Radley, Harper Lee is not a private citizen. The fame of her one novel ensured that she would never stop being a famous writer, giving her a role that she could never abdicate, indelible to forty-six years of not publishing another book. This summer, a *New York Times* headline announced that "Harper Lee Writes Again." She had written, for the July issue of *O: The Oprah Magazine*, a short and entirely unrevealing letter about the joys of childhood reading. ("Dear Oprah, Do you remember when you learned to read, or like me, can you not even remember a time when you didn't know how?") So little had we come to expect from Lee,

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now eighty, that news of this letter was sufficient to make the papers. The Associated Press announced that by publishing it Oprah had achieved "something of a literary coup."

But Lee had once promised to do more. For years following the publication of *To Kill a Mockingbird* in 1960, she assured interviewers that she was hard at work. "I would like to leave some record of the kind of life that existed in a very small world. I hope to do this in several novels—to chronicle something that seems to be very quickly going down the drain." She wanted, she said, to become "the Jane Austen of south Alabama." But then, Austen published anonymously. And she never dealt with Hollywood.

JUST AS AUSTEN WAS CONVINCED that "three or four families in a country village is the very thing to work on," Lee once told an interviewer that the country "naturally produces more writers than, say, an environment like 82nd Street in New York. In small town life and in rural life you know your neighbors." The Alabama town of Maycomb in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a proxy for Monroeville, where Lee was raised and where she currently resides. Her father's family had lived in the American South from the late seventeenth century; and, though not descended from Robert E. Lee, as is sometimes reported, her paternal grandfather was a Confederate veteran of twenty-two battles, including Gettysburg. Her maternal grandparents—whose last name was Finch—had owned a tremendous Alabama cotton plantation. Nelle Harper and her siblings knew that they were—as Atticus tells his children—"not from run-of-the-mill people," but the "product of several generations' gentle breeding."

Lee always maintained that Atticus was modeled on her father—so much so that in order to prepare for the film adaptation of the novel, Gregory Peck went to Monroeville to study him. Although Amasa Coleman Lee, called A.C., did not always behave like Atticus—he insisted that the progressive Methodist minister Ray Whatley, who would later work with Martin Luther King Jr., "get off the 'social justice' and get back on the gospel"—it was his experience of hopelessly defending black men unable to get a fair trial that his daughter would partly appropriate in her fiction. He did it only once, in 1919, when he was court-appointed to defend two men on murder charges. His clients were found guilty and hanged; their bodies were mutilated and their body parts packaged and mailed to the family of their alleged victim, proof that justice had been done. Whether A.C. Lee's attitude was like Atticus's—resolute, telling his daughter that "simply because we were licked a hundred years before we started is no reason for us not to try to win"—Lee's biographer cannot tell us.

As for Lee's mother, Shields argues that the absence of Scout's mother in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is revealing—that Lee wrote her out of the novel because of her conflicted feelings for a woman who seems to have suffered from severe mental illness, rarely leaving the house and causing scenes when she did. Truman Capote, one of Lee's closest childhood friends (and the model for the novel's Dill), told his biographer Gerald Clarke that Lee's mother had twice tried to drown her daughter in the bathtub: "When they talk about Southern grotesque, they're not kidding!"

But the terrifying, crazed mother has no place in the kind of novel that Lee was constructing. A Charles Saxon cartoon from 1961 depicts two women in a bookshop, one holding a copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and telling the other, "It's about the South, but it's not—you know—Southern." In many ways, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a criticism of the southern novel as much as it is a criticism of southern society. Boo Radley, thought to be some kind of Gothic monstrosity, is just a shy man. Tom Robinson's deformity—his crippled left side and small shriveled hand—results merely from a boyhood accident with a cotton gin. And instead of making him a freak, Tom's withered arm proves—to us, if not to the all-white jurymen—that he was incapable of raping Mayella Ewell, as she claimed.

Lee left Alabama in 1949, when at twenty-three she dropped out of law school to move to New York and try for a writer's life, despite having written little more than squibs for the University of Alabama's student humor magazine. She worked as an airline ticketing agent until friends lent her enough money so that, by living frugally, she could work only at her writing for a year. By the end of 1957, on the basis of preliminary chapters for a novel then titled "Atticus," she was offered a publishing contract with Lippincott. According to Shields, Lee provided her editor, the talented Tay Hohoff, with the shape of a narrative and fragmentary anecdotes about her hometown, and over the next two years Hohoff helped her to transform them into a coherent work.

THOSE WHO TURN TO *TO KILL a Mockingbird* after some years away are usually surprised by how long it takes for Tom Robinson's trial to begin. It is still the novel's great subject, but the first hundred pages are dedicated to Lee's depiction of life in Maycomb—sleepy and poor, but charming, where for church fund-raisers the Methodists challenge the Baptists to touch football, and all the fathers play. This fascination with small-town life seems to have been what sent her to Holcomb, Kansas, during the months between finishing *To Kill a Mockingbird* and awaiting its publication, when she left New York to assist Capote in researching what they thought would be an article on a small town's response to the murder of a farmer and his family. Both Shields and Capote's biographer agree that while Holcomb residents initially kept Capote at a distance (some suspecting that a man so unusual-looking, preternaturally tiny with a disconcertingly babyish voice, might well be the one who had killed the Clutters), they trusted Lee—what the case's lead detective later called her "down-home style," her "knack for saying the right things. Once the ice was broken, I was told, Capote could get people to talking." Although Capote's refusal to give Lee more credit for *In Cold Blood* eventually caused a rift in their friendship, Capote once admitted that he "could never have done the job" of the book "without her deep probing of the people of that little town."

In Maycomb, all the great virtues are to be found in miniature. A terminally ill woman who decides to break her morphine addiction so that she can die "beholden to nothing and nobody" is described as "the bravest person I ever knew." Atticus is a Christian out of a morality play, who when Bob Ewell spits tobacco juice in his face tells his children that he's grateful for it: "I destroyed his last shred of credibility at that trial, if he had any to begin with. The man had to have some kind of comeback, his kind always does. So if spitting in my face and threatening me saved Mayella Ewell one extra beating, that's something I'll gladly take." There is nothing subtle about him. His goodness is as unbesmirched as Bob Ewell's evil, but

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that is the source of his appeal.

In the American Film Institute's list of the greatest movie heroes, Atticus was ranked first, followed by other impossible men: Indiana Jones, Superman, Zorro. In adapting the book for film, the director Robert Mulligan knew that there was no need to make Atticus more complicated: he is a "fantasy figure—the father we would all have liked to have had." And his goodness is what readers cling to. To claim that he lacks nuance would be to deny the potential greatness of men, particularly white men. The moment after the jury renders its verdict, dramatized in the film, when all the black spectators in the courthouse rise to their feet in homage to Atticus—"Miss Jean Louise, stand up. Your father's passin' "—was the shot that Peck told friends had won him an Academy Award.

Much of Lee's novel is moral pap: "Naw, Jem, I think there's just one kind of folks. Folks." Or: "Jem, how can you hate Hitler so bad an' then turn around and be ugly about folks right at home." Or: "If you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view ... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." The conclusion to the novel's most dramatic moment—when Scout shames a lynch mob into disbanding—leads Atticus to the irresistible induction that "maybe we need a police force of children." One desperately wants to believe this world, where all it takes at a lynching is the presence "of an eight-year-old child to bring 'em to their senses."

But who can believe it? This is escapist literature, spectacularly sentimental, and all the more seductive for coming in the guise of the realistic novel, conveyed by a narration that is sharp and often very funny, illustrated by characters so skillfully drawn that they are nearly convincing even when they act impossibly. Even the jury's guilty verdict is given a positive gloss at the end. A sympathetic neighbor tells Scout that "I was sittin' there on the porch last night, waiting. I waited and waited to see you all come down the sidewalk, and as I waited I thought, Atticus Finch won't win, he can't win, but he's the only man in these parts who can keep a jury out so long in a case like that. And I thought to myself, well, we're making a step—it's just a baby step, but it's a step." This is propaganda, but for the right side. Lee is brilliant at this sort of thing; but when propaganda is brilliant, even for the right side, it is demagoguery.

When Lee became famous—when her book was chosen by the Book-of-the-Month Club and the Literary Guild, when it made the best-seller lists and was translated into forty languages, when she won the Pulitzer Prize and started speaking at university commencements—she became less the writer of *To Kill a Mockingbird* than its spokeswoman. Her few published writings after it are all extensions of the brand—essays extolling the virtues of childhood, the importance of loving one's neighbor and one's country. In "When Children Discover America," published in *McCall's* in 1965, on the rewards of childhood travel, she writes of how "In the Far West, I would show children San Francisco. The Chinese people there are *such* wonderful Americans.... Younger children may not respond in words, but they will drink everything in with their eyes, and fill their minds with awareness and wonder. It's an experience they will enjoy and remember all their lives." Would this have been published if she weren't "Harper Lee"? Or "Love—in Other Words" in *Vogue*: "There is only one kind of love—love. But the different manifestations of love are uncountable: At an unfamiliar night noise a mother will spring from bed.... What is love? Many things are like love.... Every creation of man's mind that has withstood the buffeting of time was born of love." This is the work of a writer who is unable to stop overhearing herself, who is consumed by thoughts of how she will sound to the thousands of impressionable people who send her fan mail. Her sentences—"The Chinese people there are *such* wonderful Americans"—are no longer the language of a novelist.

Shields suggests that Hohoff's retirement from Lippincott in the early 1970s stymied Lee from finishing her second novel, which is certainly plausible, but Shields's knowledge of Hohoff and Lee's relationship is too poorly sourced to be of much use. The looseness of Shields's research reveals itself in the awkwardness of his diction, the forced connections Shields makes to connect the few facts he does know: "No doubt a fleeting thought of Miss Watson crossed Nelle's mind as she entered the epicenter of English intellectual life," he writes (Miss Watson, Shields thrillingly discovers, was the name of her high school English teacher). And he is probably not trying to be coy when he tells us that "I cannot say if she is homosexual (she was friends with Capote and other openly gay people)." Biographers must make do with what they can get, but Shields has brought so little to this project—no general knowledge of Monroeville's culture, nothing on 1950s publishing—that the book often reads like little more than an assemblage of other people's newspaper articles. (In the book's introduction, Shields boasts that through "an online database at the University of Virginia, I located perhaps one hundred articles from national newspapers about *To Kill a Mockingbird* and e-mailed them to myself.") Shields's chapter on the novel's film adaptation will seem awfully familiar to anyone who has encountered his main sources, the director's and producer's commentaries on the DVD.

Shields mentions allegations that Capote, who read the novel in manuscript and made editing suggestions, was its true author, and denies them by relating that Hohoff's son-in-law "said that such a deception wouldn't have occurred to Nelle" and by the argument that "given Truman's inability to keep anybody's secrets, it's highly unlikely that he wouldn't have claimed right of authorship after the novel became famous." Shields might have marshaled more cogent evidence, but something about giving the credit to Capote would probably still appeal. He spent his childhood summers in Monroeville, where he would set his novel *The Grass Harp*; and if you squint the right way, the courtroom in *To Kill a Mockingbird* resembles the Kansas courtroom of *In Cold Blood*.

But what spurs this rumor has little to do with similarities in content or outlook or idiom (few, on all counts). It is rather that Capote seems a born storyteller, who channeled his childhood grief and adult ostracism into a series of books, and whose career ended by drugs and alcohol, not a quiet stepping away. He, and not Lee, is what an artist is supposed to look like; a pity his work is of questionable merit. A biographer needs to shape the stories of a life into a narrative that makes sense. Shields's biography is noteworthy only because it is the first. That a better one will emerge is inevitable so long as *To Kill a Mockingbird* remains compulsory reading for every twelve-year-old in America. ■

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Ante Establishment

WHEN I CAME TO WASHington from Baltimore in 1974, I had reason to be interested in a profound question: Do Republicans make better poker players than Democrats? My $15,000 salary at the *Baltimore Sun* remained unchanged, but the mortgage on my new house was four times the old one. So my Friday night game, which often lasted until 6 a.m., became a matter of survival.

SEVEN YEARS LATER, I MOVED OVER TO *The Washington Post* with a modestly improved salary, a second mortgage, brutal tuition bills, and a higher-stakes poker game. Survival required accurate assessment of how reckless Richard Viguerie, the grandfather of right-wing direct mail, would be with $1,000 on the table, or whether Louisiana Representative Buddy Roemer would raise or fold. I never got a chance to play with Duke Cunningham at the now infamous poker parties hosted by defense contractor Brent Wilkes at the Watergate and Westin Grand. But I have played with congressmen from Massachusetts, Alabama, Louisiana, Missouri, Georgia, and California; Washington's top divorce lawyer; former Governor William Weld; a chairman of the Republican National Committee; Attorney General John Ashcroft's counsel; a judge on the D.C. Circuit; champion Democratic fundraisers; and countless Capitol Hill staffers and lobbyists.

POKER IS THE QUINTESSENTIAL WASHington game. A group of men (there are few women) get together to bull and rib while each tries to inflict as much damage and suffering as possible. Presidents—including Warren Harding, Franklin Roosevelt, and Harry Truman—have been devotees of the game. These days, there is a well-known judicial-legal game in which Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia plays. I have no firsthand knowledge, but I have heard accounts of this game as "amateur night" with low stakes and a lot of loose calling.

REPORTERS ARE GENERALLY TOO CIRCUMspect to be really good or really bad. That rule of thumb, however, did not apply to a prominent author/investigative reporter (you have to guess). Initially, I could barely afford his game, so I was cautious, slowly building a stake. The famous reporter, in contrast, played almost every hand, an attractive strategy for everyone else at the table. One night, he said he would rather die than play like me. I muttered quietly to myself that I hoped he would continue to play his way forever.

THE BEST PLAYER I HAVE RUN INTO, whom I shall call X to avoid offending Christian right donors to his think tank, is a Republican. X, who played in a Capitol Hill game where the big winner would often be in the $7,000-plus range, used to make so much money that he could have given up his day job. Why was he so successful? Republicans are much less risk-averse than Democrats, and taking risks is crucial to poker. Howard Baker noted that Ronald Reagan's 1981 tax cut was a "riverboat gamble." The GOP has consistently demonstrated a willingness to risk high deficits, especially to cut taxes that fall on their biggest donors. The party advocating preemptive war is not likely to be cowed by a big bet. Democrats, conversely, are the party of risk-aversion—supportive of the safety net, opposed to new weapons systems, and sympathetic to protective trade policies. They are less able to tolerate the tension and uncertainty of a game in which a week's salary—or more—can be won or lost in a single hand.

ANOTHER ARGUMENT FOR THE VIEW THAT Republicans make better poker players is that poker rewards what feminists have long considered one of the worst attributes of men: the capacity to "objectify" the other. In poker, friends, colleagues, and even loved ones become subjects of manipulation and deceit—sources of cash who must be persuaded to make mistakes and to misjudge their strengths and your weaknesses. The game, pitting men against men in a zero-sum competition, is the classic form of evolutionary conflict. The logic underlying this argument requires a book to explain (you will be able to buy it on August 28; it's called *Building Red America*, by yours truly). But the quick and dirty summary is that the Republican Party's candidates attract a greater percentage of men than women by advocating a male view of life as a game in which the rewards justly go to the winners.

IN KEEPING WITH THIS THEORY OF THE GOP as the party that embraces male evolutionary psychology, I've noticed that conservative poker players are more willing to go for the kill. They will crush an opponent with big bets in the closing round when the aggressor knows, from the visible cards, that he is a "lock," or sure winner. Many liberals in these circumstances will simply check and turn over their cards to collect a more modest amount. I remember a right-wing game in Alexandria: When we discovered a shortfall of $100, instead of letting the winners absorb it, everyone but me voted to make the losers pay, jacking up their debt to make up the deficit. This should not be interpreted, however, to mean that liberals are nicer or that they are worse poker players. It may well be that the liberal winner recognizes that it could prove more lucrative over time to keep a loser in the game than to beat the crap out of him that Thursday night and never see him again.

AND CONSERVATIVES ARE VULNERABLE to the one thing that can ruin even the best poker player. Remember X, the conservative think-tank head who routinely pulled in several thousand per game? A bachelor until late middle age, X got married a few years ago, and, more recently, he became a father. These joyous events have made him happy. They have also killed his poker game. For the last year, he has been a net loser. X attributes this to the fact that, because of his family obligations, he is both tired and he plays more cautiously. Maybe, but the real culprit is love. In a game where the goal is to inflict as much financial and psychological harm as possible, love is fatal. Compassion—whether conservative or liberal—is bad for the serious poker player. I find that, when I invite a friend to join a game and try to protect him as he learns the intricacies at the table, I invariably lose. Empathy and affection damage the ability to win. I think the person who probably best understands all this is Karl Rove.

THOMAS B. EDSALL

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Israel's Unilateralism

Beyond Gaza

ROBERT ZELNICK

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In August 2005, Israel closed its Gaza settlements and withdrew some 8,000 Jews who had lived there. In *Israel's Unilateralism,* award-winning journalist Robert Zelnick explains Israel's once-unthinkable disengagement from Gaza and tells what it might lead to in the future. In his highly engaging journalistic style, Zelnick chronicles the evolution of the policy that led to this earth-shaking event and underscores the politically realist-minded assumptions that continue to drive the policy forward.

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